

Anna Hastert  
Harlan Community High School  
Harlan, Iowa  
Honduras, Factor 10  
**If You Only Knew**

Just looking at Honduras people may say, “What a beautiful country.” Honduras has a beautiful ocean that goes for miles and a dark, lush, green forest. True beauty fills the land. Well, unfortunately, not all of it. Once one works his way in from the coast, the land seems to look drier, deader than a doorknob, bare, and just trashy! It is really a shame, and I do not think people even realize that this gorgeous country has such rough terrain and such economic problems. Vacationers do not notice such problems because they want to go somewhere exquisite and where they can actually do things. Honduras by the coast is like that, but up in the mountains another lifestyle is trying to survive.

Since World War I, non-government organizations (NGOs) have been coming into Honduras trying to help them with their safe water supply. This process seems like an easy fix; however, it has been the opposite. NGOs have been working on building the poorer part of this country a safe water system, but so far they have not been successful. The primary cause is that the citizens do not know how to operate the systems once the NGOs have left, and people just do not have the money to pay their water bills. Systems that have been built are being put to use, but the economy cannot thrive when revenue is not coming in for their services, and this is just a complete mess. The majority of the men in Honduras are farmers, and those men who do not own land typically work on other people’s land. Their income is very low and ranges from fifty-seven to ninety-five limpira a day. Now in American dollars, that comes to about three to five dollars. These people are basically living life on the edge every day. Most of the mothers are stay-at-home moms or housewives, and the only income that these families receive is what the men make. This is pretty bad for a typical family that has four to six kids. Main meals of these low income citizens is usually potato chips and Coca-Cola products, and this is where all of their income is going. It is no surprise when they do not pay their water bills because they need the money to feed their family. The consumption of this junk food leads to even more problems throughout this country: high blood pressure, high diabetes rate, obesity, and poor dental hygiene. The natives are so under educated that there just is not a way for their economy to get better if they do not know how to take care of themselves first. Just recently, the Peace Corp went to Honduras and helped teach these people how to take care of themselves. They taught the residents how to brush their teeth; apparently, they did not know that all of this pop consumption was causing their teeth to decay. The Peace Corp also helped teach them to plant gardens so they could have healthier food to eat. After teaching the citizen horticulture practices, however, the gardens soon started to fall apart because of the cost to run the operation. As a result, cost and lack of knowledge is pushing this country back from moving forward.

Although the small gardens were not successful, many residents of Honduras are farmers. The “typical” subsistent farm family is four to six people, and if their income is high enough, they have one to two pets. The pets vary from household to household. Some may have pet pig while others have pet mules. The selection of a pet depends on what use they have for it. The typical Honduran family does not have the money to spend on health care, so unless injuries are life threatening, they are not going to the hospital. Even when it comes to pregnancies, the mothers will typically have their child at home, with the assistance of a midwife, because of the sky-rocketing prices of the health bills. The mothers will still go to the hospital and have regular prenatal checkups, but when citizens go to the hospital, they either go in need of an emergency or because the hospital is receiving free medication for the residents. The typical age of mothers is fourteen and up. Young mothers puts a dent in their society in that they can barely afford food to put on the table each day, let alone adding a new member to the family and being able to support that member. The typical farm family has an adobe house with a clay-tiled roof. Some houses have a cement floor and some do not. Families usually own from one-half to two acres per household,

and the crops that they typically plant are corn and dry beans. Farm families are usually low income since they do not own very much land and the land is very acidic. There is not any access to private or community market for any of these families due to cost of upkeep, so most families purchase their food at a pulperia, a convenient store in the back of a community member's household.

One way to improve Honduras's farm families' lives is the use of clean water and fresh food. Instead of using pulperias, plant gardens where people can purchase healthy food. This would give the owners of the pulperias a career, and the food would be better for the community. These steps would still be an advantage to the pulperia owners because if they had land right by their houses, then they could still have their job right at home. Only a couple of gardens would help the health of the community, but it would be a hard adjustment because citizens are used to eating unhealthy, fattening food that is hard on their bodies. But the long term effects of this would be worth the hard time getting used to the change.

Not having safe water puts a damper on about everything. The family cannot produce enough food because if they cannot properly dispose of their waste and keep their water clean, then how are they supposed to produce crops from the contaminated water? They cannot. After so much human waste being put on these fields, the crops just become trash. Profit will be low if they sell it. Now the water that flows down from the mountains would be alright for watering their crops, but it still does not bring in the best crop. As long as the water stays uncontaminated then the better the profit, but this fresher water still does not help out that much. The safety of the product is not at its best and has the possibility of making consumers ill. To create more revenue, though, the products of clean, purified water would be amazing for this country. When a person is looking to purchase a crop, he wants it to be as clean as can be and valuable for a high profit. Honduras needs a hydration plan to guard against illness and disease.

The current situation of the foul water is atrocious. Fifty thousand children, aged five and under, die each year from drinking this infected water. That is 50,000 Hondurans who could be saved if more time were spent on this economic problem and the people were trained how to operate and maintain the purifying systems set up by outside organizations. Honduras needs to take responsibility for their well being and stop relying on NGOs. Training the citizens in operations and maintenance would have a huge influence on the population. For example, 80% of Hondurans have a detected illness due to the unsafe water that they have consumed. The dwellers in Honduras contract malaria, dengue fever, dysentery, intestinal parasites, diarrhea, and even death just because of a water problem. All Hondurans are at the same risk and disadvantage despite age and economic situations, and the land is affected just as badly as the people are.

Trends in improving water quality remain the same as they have always been. Yes, there have been pilas, above ground cement water containers that contain approximately 110 gallons of fresh water, that have been built. The citizens, however, have not been trained in the maintenance of these facilities to keep these systems up-to-date and safe. The education for a typical person in Honduras is to the sixth grade because they do not have the money to continue education. How are they supposed to know how to manage things in life if they only make it to the basics in school and the NGOs do not train them in managing these safe water systems? They simply cannot keep living like this. Too many people are dying, and many others' lives are on the line. I do believe these pilas are a step in the right direction. Having a safe water system that guarantees the citizens water during the dry season is necessary in this poor community. Without safe water, people go without fluids and eventually get to the point of dehydration, especially in the dry season. Another advantage of the pilas is their proximity; citizens do not have to walk to the rivers and back up the mountain. This journey is hard on people, especially pregnant women whose husbands are working in the fields and have no one around to help them.

The resolution to this enormous problem would improve the country immensely. With safe water, crops

would be clean, and the people would not have to worry about disease. Having that big load off of their backs would be so reassuring to these people. Clean water would give them hope, and their economy would definitely thrive. Their crops could sell for good money, and their families could actually be able to buy more than food for just a day. They could work towards getting health care and having better living environments. Women could have their babies in hospitals and not have to worry about the prices. And the land would be in much better shape. It would still be acidic, but with fresh water being used, the crops would still improve significantly.

Climate change would dramatically affect this factor, especially if the climate warms. During the dry season, the water in the rivers tend to dry up, and if warm temperatures remain for a longer period of time, then more illness and death will be present within the community. If the climate changes so that it rains more often, however, then it may benefit the people of Honduras. The water is by no means safe for the people to drink, but it will keep the people from dehydration despite the risk of life-threatening diseases. Population growth is also another factor that could affect the safe water supply. The more the population grows, the more problems are created with securing a sustainable, safe water supply. If the citizens of Honduras cannot control or survive with the pilas that they have now, then there is no possible way for the Hondurans to make it through a significant population growth. Another factor is water scarcity, which already plays a factor. Scarcity of water causes illness and slow, painful death. Urbanization would also affect the water supply in many ways. Additional work as a community would be beneficial in the short term, but urbanization in the long term would require a higher demand for water. Energy demand could also play a part. I highly doubt energy demand will be that big of a factor, though, considering the country has far bigger “smaller” problems to fix. Finally, pollution could really make matters worse. If their water supply becomes anymore polluted than it already is, then they are in major trouble. The illness and death rate will sky rocket, and pretty soon their might not be much left for Honduras.

In order to address this problem I think it is important to educate the citizens on how this river water is affecting their communities and populations. Another step is to place more pilas in the communities, properly teach the people how to manage the pila systems, and check-up on them every once in awhile to see how they are getting along. The pilas are already in place—people just need to know how to use and maintain them. Now, to accomplish this goal, the national government needs to pitch in some money to go towards the implementing of the pilas, and members of the community need to give up some of their time and help set-up the pilas. NGO representatives could travel there every month to just check up on the economic status with these new systems. If the citizens were taught well and the situation is improving, then the check ups could be less often. If the situation worsens, then workers can go see what they are struggling with and stay for awhile and try to help them get back on the right track again.

So with all this being said, it seems like a simple task to fix. In all reality we know it is not, but with international help from multiple communities, I really do believe that we could make an impact in this country.

### **Works Cited**

Finley, Bruce. "Dying for Clean Water." *Denver Post* 3 Nov. 2003: n. pag. *DenverPost.Com*. Web. 18 Sept. 2011.

Hale, Carol. "Inspiring Volunteer Stories: A Man with a Mission." *Honduras.Com*. N.p., Mar. 2009. Web. 18 Sept. 2011.

"Honduras." *Pure Water for the World*. N.p., 2011. Web. 18 Sept. 2011.

*Honduras Mission*. Pilas & Latrines, n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2011.

Rosmann, Mark. Personal interview. 3 Sept. 2011.