Preserving and Expanding the Enxet Legacy
Paraguay
The College of Idaho
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Section I: Narrative

The aim of this project was to refurbish a community center that can serve as a meeting ground to foster digital literacy and sewing skills amongst members of El Estribo. Our project aims to empower women to independently make and sell craft through the use of sewing machines so they may diversify their income source, as well as promote digital literacy amongst the Enxet community with hopes to expand job and educational opportunities outside of their village.

When it comes to funding, our project did not require any external funding aside from the Davis Project for Peace grant. Thankfully, we had the support of our families in Paraguay to offer us their hospitality.

Having environmental studies and international political economy as our areas of study, we both understand the broad issues of marginalized communities. This drew us to base our project idea on an indigenous community. We chose to work in our host site, Paraguay, since the both of us have strong family connections to the country, and after researching the different organizations in Paraguay that work with indigenous groups, we came across Tierraviva—a well known non profit from Asuncion that works in the Chaco region. Through Tierraviva, we were able to connect with the Enxet community who were then eager to organize and participate in a project with us.

The issue our project is responding to largely exists because of decades of exclusion and neglect from Paraguayan institutions to indigenous communities. There continues to be a gap between indigenous communities and the more urban side of Paraguay. Issues such as racism, lack of opportunities, poor infrastructure, corruption, weather and geography all play a role in the neglect that indigenous communities have faced for decades. The purpose of our project is to alleviate and empower the communities that we are working with. Working in our host site was unforgettable and completely out of our comfort zone as it is mostly rural and evidently does not receive the same amount of infrastructural attention that the eastern side of Paraguay receives. The western Chaco region is known for its intensive role in the agricultural industry. Driving into the Chaco we noticed many cattle ranches and even the burning of land plots. Then upon arrival into the community, we noticed the amount of burnt trees surrounding the villages from wildfires last year. The area is incredibly dry and during the time of our project El Estribo was enduring a drought. Despite the drought, the Karanda villagers generously welcomed us and ensured that we felt comfortable and safe. During our project, we both noticed how divided the work was between the genders. Each day the female volunteers were expected to cook for the male volunteers who were painting, installing windows or adding cement to the floor.

Overall, the project went as planned. The COVID-19 pandemic was our main concern since there is a significant unvaccinated population. While El Estribo has not been affected by COVID-19, we as outsiders had to follow all the sanitary guidelines to avoid the spread of COVID-19. If we could give advice to future students for the project in a pandemic, we would advise that the project members get fully vaccinated and to set aside a budget for supplies- masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, etc. Other logistical issues slowed down our schedule such as the renovation of the WIFI antenna in the area and the installation of the doors for the community center. Thankfully, the strong help from the Enxet volunteers was crucial to finalize the project on time. Communication was another of the challenges we faced. While many of the older folk understand Spanish, they can only speak Guarani. While both of us speak Spanish, only one of us speaks Guarani. Another challenge was that we had to limit the capacity of people to attend our workshops. For the time in Karanda, not everyone could attend since we were in a closed space.
Despite any challenges, this project allowed us to reflect on a new definition of peace. To us, peace is a state of empowerment and equity. Peace is being able to have the same opportunities and access to resources that can empower you as an individual and also give you the means to take care of yourself and your family without feeling excluded by society. In the short term, our project contributed to peace by providing the Enxet in Karanda a meaningful way to engage through community lunches, painting, renovating and taking an active role in the project. In the long term, the project will provide the villagers with another income source outside of the agricultural sector, as COVID-19 and the increasing droughts have already limited agricultural work in the area. Also, the computer lab & sewing machines are now available resources for the community to continue to learn. Thanks to Remigio and Tierraviva, they will continue to have workshops and use the space for educational purposes. A week after our project finished, the village leader sent us an update that they were having more IT workshops from his connections with the Ministry of Education. Overall, the project provided new skills to the villagers, which will help them engage into opportunities even beyond Karanda and the Chaco region. This project will allow for villagers to increase their human capital and contribute to their community development.

One change that occurred in the workshop portion of the project was our itinerary after having talked with Tierraviva. While the non-profit guided us to the village and brought all of our heavy equipment to Karanda for us in their truck, we agreed that it would be best to focus on the IT skills and sewing workshops since at the same time that we were in Karanda, Tierraviva was already giving land rights workshops to the community independently from our project.

Overall, our project showed us that one project cannot solve all the issues in the world, whether it be corruption, drought, poor infrastructure, gender inequality, etc. Nonetheless, a project can be a start to empower and provide equity to those that really need it. The project also taught us how detrimental exclusive systems are towards communities like El Estribo. For so long indigenous groups like the Enxet have been ignored by most of Paraguayan society. Today, it is a collective problem that not many members of the community are able to expand their human capital outside of their village. And if they do, it does not guarantee that they will apply their new skillset to their home community if there are no resources to support them. After this project, we are feeling more drawn to womens and indigenous rights. Our project confirmed our knowledge that communities like the Enxet have been forgotten for so long that there is so much need.

Personal Statements

- “This project showed that indigenous communities like El Estribo need integral support for their sustainable development. It is on us to create a more inclusive and equal Paraguay for everyone.” Jazmin Nuñez
- “Through our project, we saw how marginalized groups like the Enxet continue to rely on outside help because of the longstanding exclusion from society. This project showed us how important it is to increase human capital within marginalized groups like the Enxet so that they do not have to rely on outsiders and can thrive independently.” Mia Maldonado

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