

Participatory Health Care Intervention in Los Robles Nicaragua

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Located in the north of Nicaragua, the state of Jinotega produces almost two thirds of Nicaragua's annual crop. From here one hour toward north is found the community Los Robles, home to more than 500 coffee farmer families. Due to isolation and high rates of poverty, Los Robles faces a number of economic and health challenges that exacerbate the living conditions of the villagers. The Brigadistas, a team of community health workers, has been crucial for the wellbeing of the community in the last decades. They take care for pregnant women, revise children for cases of malnourishment and stunting, and respond to health emergencies in the community such as injuries or infectious diseases.

At this moment, upper respiratory illness is one of the most pressing issues in the community. Together asthma and other respiratory diseases account for 37% of all clinic visits in 2015. Noting the urgent need to reduce this trend, the brigadistas reach Emory Goizueta Social Enterprise through the support of the NGO NCHC. This collaboration grown afterwards to include the Global Health Institute, and lead to the formation of a team Comprised of six students and six advisors from five different disciplines. We aim to develop together a comprehensive health model that will be adopted by the community and improve respiratory health.

The project consists of three components including health education, clinical management and health project implementation. All these three components will be developed with the brigadistas in order to facilitate the community outreach and empower local capacity. In the education component, we aim to conduct participatory research with the brigadistas to understand the main causes of upper respiratory illness in the community. After knowing the main causes, the proposal is to strengthen the collaboration between the brigadistas and the clinic in place, leveraging local resources to bring up possible solutions for the issue. Finally, a health intervention will be designed and implemented through the leadership of the brigadistas with the support of the students and other stakeholders.

Above all, building capacity on brigadistas is the path to increase community resilience toward illness. This health model will be applicable to other emerging diseases as well as chronically diseases that might be impacting the wellbeing of the villagers. However, the usage of the model must be adapted and managed by the local brigadistas. In this sense, we believe the empowerment of the community itself will be the key for sustainable bottom-up improvement.