CONAPAC WATER TREATMENT PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION REPORT
PRACTICUM DESCRIPTION AND LESSONS LEARNED WITH CONAPAC

By: Elizabeth O’Brien, October 2015

Executive Summary
Between the dates of July 12, 2015 and August 9, 2015 a team of four students from the University of Colorado, Boulder worked with CONAPAC, the Civil Association for Conservation of the Peruvian Amazon Environment, in Iquitos, Peru and in communities with whom CONAPAC is involved along the Amazon and Napo Rivers. CONAPAC serves those in need in the rainforest through the provision of education and other tools that are necessary for sustainable living to the people who live along the Amazon and Napo Rivers. The goal of the team was to review the state of the water program that CONAPAC has founded in 31 small communities and provide recommendations of how the organization can better their monitoring and evaluation process. This goal was accomplished through visiting 17 of these communities and conducting focus groups in each community. Focus groups revolved around themes of functionality, use, and management of community water systems.

The water treatment plant is a simple four-stage filter system that is assembled by CONAPAC in Iquitos and then transported by boat to the community for construction. The community members then work with a contractor to construct the water plant. Once the plant is constructed CONAPAC monitors the treatment process and tests the water for one year. Their partnership with the community continues for as long as the community is a part of the Adopt-A-School Program.

CONAPAC is currently looking to improve its monitoring and evaluation program in order to better understand the factors that determine the success or failure of community water projects. They want to design a monitoring plan that will enable CONAPAC to extract themselves from the communities and allow the communities to become more autonomous. CONAPAC enlisted the aid of a team of students from the University of Colorado, Boulder to gather information and opinions from focus groups in the community and to provide CONAPAC with useful recommendations on how to improve the water program.

The CU team collected data from 17 rural communities along the Amazon and Napo rivers that are part of CONAPAC’s water program. From this data, we found that the water program is beneficial and valued by the communities. A majority of residents use the systems and are satisfied with them and the water that they drink. The biggest issue faced by the communities with use of the water system was distance of some participants from the community center. Sawyer point-of-use filtration systems seem to be a good option for houses that are further from the community center. They should be an option CONAPAC considers providing in the future.

For the sustained success of the water program, the CU team made several key recommendations to CONAPAC. Suggestions are presented in three sections: Specific Recommendations for CONAPAC Water Program, General Recommendations for CONAPAC Water Program, and General Recommendations for CONAPAC. The recommendations contained within this report include creating consistent community files, creating a cost sharing program, revisiting communities with wooden plants, having an in depth community evaluation process, utilizing local operators as local circuit riders, arranging sister communities, increasing communication with communities, better integrating the Adopt-A-School program and increasing community support when teachers are not present.
In the report presented to CONAPAC additional recommendations included are to find a way to enforce saving money for future breakdowns, to cut the committee down to three people, to create a process for informing all communities when requirements change, and to focus on relationships with communities.

The communities in general were not used to brainstorming and did not know how to come up with ways that CONAPAC could better assist them. But, I think, some of our ideas, like the local circuit rider, can help the communities to become more autonomous and will allow CONAPC to become only minimally involved. This would allow the NGO to extend their work into new communities and to focus on new areas of assistance to the people.

The fieldwork practicum with CONAPAC was an amazing experience despite the challenges of working in another country which for me included working at a slower pace and language barriers. I think the practicum is a great addition to the Engineering for Developing Communities Program. Working in the field with an NGO allowed my classroom education to come to life and made me more confident in the skills and knowledge I have gained while in the EDC program. I felt that the knowledge the team gained at CU Boulder allowed us to make great recommendations to CONAPAC about how to improve their water monitoring and evaluation program. And, I feel confident in my ability to work with an NGO and make an impact on the developing world in the future.