



Environmental Health, Consciousness, and Sustainability in San Luis Atolotitlan



San Luis Atolotitlan is a small rural town of about 1,000 people in south-central Mexico, on the Pueblan side of the Puebla-Oaxaca border. Though it's less than 50km away from the second biggest city in the state, Tehuacan, it's a two and a half hour bus ride on an unpaved road that twists through the gorgeous, UNESCO-recognized Mixteca-Poblana. When conducting a community survey, it became clear that while community members recognized an array of environmental issues including deforestation and trash buildup, they lacked an understanding of the roots of the problems and, crucially, the resources to address them.

Many of the problems that the community members mentioned had roots in, or contributed to, climate change, and in collaboration with local leaders we thought about a project that would benefit the most families and allow us to address environmental concerns. An option that addressed all three became clear: wood-efficient stoves! With the help of USAID SPA funding, we were able to buy 84 wood-efficient stoves and distribute them to families throughout San Luis.

Though environmental concerns were the priority, other benefits quickly became clear. As we surveyed more families to inquire more specifically about wood-saving stoves, women who we interviewed told us about how they would sometimes tear up for long periods of time because of their exposure to smoke in the kitchen and they would be able to save a bit of money by having to buy less wood. The project was able to integrate environmental issues with health and economic ones!



Everyone who received a stove was required to attend a few educational sessions before the stoves were distributed. In the first session, with the help of a fellow volunteer, we explained the concepts of climate change and mitigation to participants in the project. In the second workshops, again with the help of fellow volunteer, we applied those concepts locally, asking participants what impacts of climate change they had noticed and challenging them to develop strategies for mitigation that they could implement in their own houses or at the community level. In the third, we connected the stove's mitigative properties with a review of the other benefits before giving the family's their new stoves.

Thus far, the stoves are a huge success. Nearly every family who received a stove has reported their wood use has been cut in half, and some families are reporting their wood use has been reduced by up to 75%! Its incredible progress towards climate change mitigation as half or more of the CO₂ once released by the community is no longer being emitted. It also means that there's less of a need to deforest because of the reduced demand for wood.

Fellow volunteer, explaining the concepts of climate change and mitigation.