

Cambridge student helps cook up change in El-Salvador

Effective international development work requires coordination with partner organisations within developing countries. Humanitarian Centre member organisation Engineers Without Borders-UK (EWB-UK), is more than aware of this. Thus, when Cambridge University student Jamie Radford chose to do an overseas placement with EWB-UK in El-Salvador he was working to support the work of a small local NGO called REDES. Jamie shared his experiences with a Cambridge audience in the Cambridge Engineering department on 20th January 2010.

EWB's website (www.ewb-uk.org) explains that "REDES works to generate the capacity for self-sufficiency and human development by encouraging beneficiary participation, facilitating processes and technology and nurturing skills".¹



*Above: Putting together a solar cooker in El-Salvador.
Picture courtesy of Jamie Radford.*

Jamie, part of the EWB's Cambridge group, went to rural El Salvador for four weeks in 2009. He was assigned the task of gathering data, through interviews and equipment testing, on three designs of cooking stoves. The purpose of this was to help assess the impact of local REDES projects in the area. This is a surprisingly complex issue in an area where open fires are still the norm, and smoke inhalation is one of the biggest killers.

Jamie's placement involved accompanying a EWB team in visits to rural villages to test three varying designs of stove: the plate design, the three burner design and the rocket stove. The test carried out were based on their fuel efficiency, ease of use, durability, speed of cooking, smoke disposal and sustainability, as well as on social issues such

The EWB team found that criticism was not very forthcoming from the locals who found it difficult to express their dissatisfaction with the stoves and were eager to support REDES, because of all the help they offered local people. On closer inspection it was found that the stoves were not being used properly and had in some cases been abandoned for the open fires.

The team were encouraged by the motivation of the locals, and suggested that a training video in the construction and proper use of the cooker stoves could help the locals and foster a sense of empowerment.

They recorded one video on how to construct what they found to be the most effective stove, the Rocket; during which they learnt a thing or two in cooking skills from the locals too!

Another popular alternative also experimented with, was the solar powered cooker; literally a reflective bowl to hold and cook food in. Sustainability was high within these rural communities. Nothing was put to waste; not even the ash from the cookers, which was used as fertiliser and, even as soap in some places.

A fire, open or stove, is a central part of life in rural areas. REDES are aware of this and continue to develop new, more efficient cookers, using EWB's findings to make them safer, easier to handle and more widely used.

To find out about Jamie's trip: <http://jamie-elsalvador-09.blogspot.com/>

To find out more about EWB-UK: <http://www.ewb-uk.org/cambridge>

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