Do you have what you need?
Assessing post-flood needs and assets in El Milagro, Peru
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Joe and I talked with Anthony, a 16-year-old resident of El Milagro, Peru. El Milagro is a community north of the coastal city Trujillo, which was devastated by the flood that resulted from El Niño associated rainfall in early 2017. Removing his smartphone from his pocket, Anthony showed us a video he personally captured of the flooding as it happened. Moving closer to Anthony so we can see his screen in the glare of the midday sun, Joe and I witnessed the raging chocolaty brown water as it poured through the streets in the video, filled with large chunks of debris and demonstrating its malevolent destructive power as it effortlessly carved and disintegrated the adobe walls of the neighborhood houses. Above the roar of the water, we heard punctuated shouts of fear from a woman off-camera, the terror in her voice transported us to that moment and filled me with a bone-chilling fear despite the fact I knew the flood waters receded months ago. Anthony confirmed the vantage point from which he took the video was just above us on the roof of one of the few remaining structures standing in El Milagro, which also served as his home. Peering over the edge of Anthony’s smartphone, we surveyed the utter destruction the floods wreaked upon this neighborhood of poor migrants, who left the jungles and mountains of Northern Peru to seek out a life in rural Trujillo only to become victimized by the raging waters.

After the 2017 floods, the remaining residents of El Milagro coalesced around Anthony’s family residence and formed an “Olla Común”, or communal kitchen, in order to help each other in their time of need. But the total devastation of their community served to limit what they could do together. In response, the research component of our Ethnographic Field School shifted from solely investigating medical plant use in the area to using a variety of anthropological methods to determine how we could help these residents emerge from the devastation and reclaim their lives. Armed with a modest amount of donated funds, we set ourselves to the task of determining how we could help.
But how should we begin? Unfortunately, El Milagro is but one of countless examples of how natural disasters abruptly interrupt the lives of many vulnerable populations throughout the world, and many organizations are vested in finding ways to provide charity and assistance to those most in need. As the effects of global climate change are likely to exasperate these natural disasters in the future, it is important to consider ways assistance can be mobilized and distributed in a manner that is both efficient and effective.

But how can well meaning people and humanitarian organizations effectively capture the needs and talents of disaster-affected communities in a way that facilitates self-reliant recovery, maintains cultural values and norms, and simultaneously reduces inequalities in the community, all while satisfying the community’s short and long term needs? In addition, what is the role of the anthropologist in this process? These questions were foremost in our minds as my classmates and I began our course in applied cultural anthropology with optimism and hope that our efforts would have meaningful effects on the lives of the residents of El Milagro.

In this paper I assess the validity and effectiveness of two methods most commonly employed by disaster relief workers as they begin to assess an affected community: A Needs Assessment and an Asset Survey. Additionally, I also explore how individuals trained in the study of anthropology may be uniquely positioned to enhance disaster relief efforts.

SITE BACKGROUND

The Olla Común in El Milagro formed when approximately 80 residents from 42 affected families decided to pool their minimal resources and establish a community kitchen. Augmented by subsistence level governmental and charitable assistance, the residents shared the cooking duties and formed relationships that helped each other cope with the flood devastation. In demographic surveys our class conducted, we learned that the people of El Milagro came from a variety of locations as well as ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. However, according to Raphael Velasquez, who served as our local informant, when the people of El Milagro migrated to Trujillo they began “squatting” on land that the Peruvian Government previously designated a flood zone.
The cyclical El Niño - Southern Oscillation (ENSO) weather event - is well documented and known to the Peruvian Government, as are its effects. Rossel et al. (1998) and Lagos et al. (2004) have analyzed the relationship between the occurrence of warm ENSO events and precipitation in northern Peru, and concluded that the region around the city of Trujillo experiences some of the strongest El Niño signals along the northwest coast of South America, with increases in rainfall over climatology typically exceeding 40% (Garcia-Herrera et al., 2008). However, due to the variation in the severity of rainfall of the ENSO, Velasquez stated the people migrating to El Milagro did not feel they were in any danger and, rather, utilized some of the building materials that comprised the flood retention walls in order to construct houses on the lands upon which they squatted. In addition, mining activity in the mountains above Trujillo served to reroute preexisting flood paths and exasperated the problem by increasing the rate and volume of the floodwaters. As a result, when the ENSO rains came in early 2017, the residents of El Milagro were taken completely unaware and were utterly unprepared.

Upon hearing of the devastation, several people associated with Utah State University organized a fund-raising campaign to rally assistance to the community. While that campaign was very successful, it represented a finite amount of funding that our group could use during the course of our applied anthropology field school. It was imperative we quickly developed a process to distribute those funds in a way that would help, not harm, the community.

Figure 2: The location of the Olla Común in the El Milagro neighborhood of the city of Trujillo, La Libertad Province, Peru. Source: Google maps at https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Olla+Comun,+Distrito+de+La+Esperanza,+Peru/-8.0422142,-79.0681762/@-8.0440823,-79.065682,1863m/data=!3m1!1e3
TWO COMMON ASSESSMENT METHODS

To assess a disaster-affected community, two primary methods are most often utilized: The Needs-based Assessment and the Asset-based Survey. Goldman and Schmalz define the Needs-Based Assessment approach as being able to decipher “what is wrong and how to fix it” (2005: 125). However, they also identify that a Needs-based approach leads to a consequence of promoting the phenomenon of disaster affected communities relying on outside agencies for assistance and, over time, developing a dependency on that assistance. This can be viewed as a critique of solely relying on a Needs Assessment. Kretzman and Mcknight (1993) reinforce this observation and emphasize that this method can lead to a system of dependency wherein efforts toward self-sustainment are actually disincentivized. Furthermore, reliance on this method may lead to affected communities resorting to the informal economy as a means of seeking additional income, as it is less likely to jeopardize their ability to receive aid. Obviously, a well intentioned aid worker just arriving to assist a disaster affected community does not want to doom his/her efforts from the start, so these critiques of the Needs-based Assessment of promoting dependency and discouraging self-reliance are very large and looming pitfalls.

However, Goldman and Schmalz (2005), also point out that a Needs Assessment is useful for identifying specific un-resourced needs or requirements the community may have that should be “gapped”, a term which refers to assistance outside organizations can provide in a timely fashion to meet immediate needs that the community is unable to address internally. Therefore, while the Needs-based Assessment has some formidable flaws in terms of promoting dependency and discouraging self-reliance, it can be useful in determining those immediate needs an aid worker can provide which the community is unable to fulfill themselves, regardless of their desire to do so.

An alternative to the Needs-based Assessment is the Asset-based Survey approach. Goldman and Schmalz define this approach as “based on community assets (people, places, businesses, organizations) [with the goal to] empower residents to realize their abilities to transform” (2005: 125). Using this method allows the researcher to concentrate on helping people help themselves and, in doing so, focuses the effort on internal sustainable solutions. The ma-
jority of the literature in this subject leans toward a preference for this method over the Needs-based Assessment, with Kretzman and Mcknight going so far as to say “all the historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort” (1993: 3).

However, even this approach does not come without pitfalls as evidenced by the question posed by Sharpe et al. at the conclusion of their endorsement of this method - “(is) community participation real, or does it represent tokenism?” (2000: 210), meaning that any attempt to mobilize the community should ensure the entire community is represented in the solution and not just a small cadre. Despite this warning, most literature on this topic advocates for an Asset-based Survey approach due to this method’s ability to promote self-reliance, lessen dependency, and promote long-term solutions that are sustainable, long after donation funds have run dry.

For both the Needs-based Assessment and the Asset-based Survey, several templates exist to assist potential humanitarian aid distributors in navigating a course whereby they are able to conduct complete assessments on a variety of topics. For example, Allen et al. (2002) from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, created a template to assess the assets of farmers wherein the questions are nested in such a way as to form a holistic picture that spans from the individual level through the associational, institutional, and natural resource levels. Using this method, a disaster relief worker can assess an entire community’s capability to mobilize across several spectrums. Furthermore, by using one of these templates and taking this approach, a disaster relief worker is able to enter a disaster-affected area and, with modest modifications to fit the specific environment, can immediately begin assessing the community’s assets in order to facilitate long-term recovery.

However, with both the Needs-based and Asset-based approaches, the question of how an anthropologist, specifically, can bring their craft to bear in this process is interesting. On the face, using these templates appears to be a relatively unsophisticated process as, with most of the questions formulated, all a disaster relief worker requires to complete the work would be a willing interviewee and the ability to communicate in language. However, an anthropologist has a unique role to play that can help illuminate the various nuances that emerge in the assessment/survey data.
For example, in a case study featuring victims of flooding in Rwalpindi, Pakistan in 2001, Mustafa analyzed the response of the international aid community and the Government of Pakistan in assisting the nearly 400,000 people affected by flooding of the Lai Nullah creek and found, in the process, that female victims of the flooding held a “much more sophisticated view of the flood hazard and its many implications” (2004: 80), which spawned Mustafa to advocate that a “gender-based approach is central not only to addressing longer-term vulnerability but also to shorter-term relief and recovery” (2004: 81). Although a geologist by trade, Mustafa’s ability to first identify the importance of gender in the community and, secondly, to see a glide path for how the community’s historically marginalized populations could assist in the recovery, demonstrates how the unique training of anthropologists, who emerge themselves in gender studies as they relate to culture and society, would serve a valuable role to any disaster relief team. As a result, an anthropological approach to conducting surveys of disaster affected communities would not only be useful in defining the environment, but could provide insight into developing and discovering long-term sustainable solutions as well.

METHODS, DATA, and ANALYSIS

Needs Assessment

We conducted the Needs-based Assessment on our first and introductory visit to the Olla Común as a means of not only building initial rapport, but also as a way to ensure that we identified the critical and immediate needs of the community as soon as possible. Our first visit was eye opening.

As our van arrived in El Milagro and carefully prodded its way through roadways recently cleared of debris, my classmates and I were awestruck at the flood devastation in full view all around us. Most haunting were the still visible waterlines on the remaining walls, approximately two feet from the ground, which held evidence of the flood’s high-water mark. Similarly chilling were the remains of doorways, sitting isolated and alone among the debris fields, defiantly demonstrating they were the...
only reinforced structures in the largely adobe-brick constructed homes and, as such, were lonely memorials of the houses to which they once belonged. Our bus finally arrived outside Anthony's residence and, in that moment, we met the people of the Olla Común who were very welcoming and warmly invited us to visit with them.

To build initial rapport, we began a free-list exercise by asking the residents what types of foods they “needed” immediately and augmented that inventory with another free-list exercise of those foods they felt they “wanted”. The latter led to a melting of the rapport wall as, with no small amount of humor, the residents of El Milagro began to frustrate our Spanish linguists with the names of specific foods and dishes from their natal villages in the mountains and jungles from which they migrated. This led to an abundant amount of laughter and, thankfully, consensus as the residents fondly recalled their favorite dishes and, perhaps optimistically, were renewed with a sense of hope to have those delicacies in the near future.

After the ice was broken, we separated into three groups in order to further survey the needs of the community. The purpose behind this decentralized approach to the Needs-based Assessment was to create a more intimate and less intimidating space where individual members could be asked specifically for their input in such a way that their voices would not be overwhelmed by the collective majority or by the stronger and more charismatic personalities in the group. As women were the more represented population of the surveyed residents that day, two of the groups were comprised only of females, attended to by the female students and professors of the field school, while the male students met with the male residents of El Milagro. While there were some disparities in the data based on gender, the males’ concern about acquiring tools to resume working being the most apparent, themes common to all three groups emerged within the data set such as the need for physical security of the neighborhood, the need for certainty regarding their future ability to rebuild in El Milagro, and the need for a safe communal space wherein their children could play. As the residents of El Milagro were technically “squatting” on the land prior to the flood, they were uncertain the Government of Peru would allow them to remain and rebuild in that location and were fearful they would be forced to relocate to a different place. As such, this uncertainty was a major source of anxiety and a potential obstacle to recovery for the residents of El Milagro.

**Prioritizing Needs**
To sort the data from the group break-out sessions, we created categories to define and prioritize the remaining needs in a manner that would assist us in making future allocation decisions with regard to the donated funds. The categories we created were 1) Short Term versus Long Term, 2) Inexpensive versus Expensive, and 3) Controllable by our Group versus Non-controllable. After defining each need with the appropriate code, we then sorted the needs by priority. Our Needs Assessment yielded the following priority groupings:

**Priority 1** (Short Term, Controllable, Inexpensive): Food, Blankets/Warm Clothing, Bottled Water, Kitchen Utensils, Small Pots, Firewood (for cooking), Toiletries, Materials for Handicrafts.

**Priority 2** (Short Term, Controllable, Expensive): Tools, Construction Materials, A Park for the Children, a Reliable Water Source.


**Priority 4** (Long Term, Controllable, Expensive): Schooling to make/sell Handicrafts.

**Priority 5** (Long Term, Non-controllable, Inexpensive): Transportation.

**Priority 6** (Long Term, Non-Controllable, Expensive): Relocate their family from the Mountains/Jungle to live in El Milagro, Jobs/Careers, a Water System.

**Comparison to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

Comparing the Priority 1 needs with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, it is apparent the majority of the Priority 1 needs of the El Milagro community align with Maslow’s Basic Physiological needs for food, water, warmth, and rest (see Figure 4). However, at first glance, the Priority 1 need of “Materials for Handicrafts” does not appear to be a Basic need and, rather, appears to be a Self-Actualization need of creative expression. If this were to be true, then it would be very strange that the El Milagro community would feel the urge to self-actualize when their basic Physiological and Safety needs were not yet met. However, in the context of the El Milagro community, it is important to understand that the production and sales of handicrafts served as an important income stream for many of the women prior to the flood and, as such, their stated need for materials to resume that income generating activity is likely more representative of a means to fulfill Maslow’s Basic needs of Physiological and/or Safety rather than a top-tiered Self-Actualization need.
Similarly, the Priority 2 needs for tools and construction materials fit the desire of the males to resume their income streams in order to provide a means to fulfill Maslow’s Basic needs, and the community’s desire to have a reliable water source similarly fits within the box of a Basic Physiological need. While the need for a playground appears out of sorts, in the context of El Milagro this need should be read as a desire for the mothers in El Milagro to have a safe location where their children can play and, as such, fits Maslow’s Basic Safety need as well as the mother’s Physiological need for rest and respite from the responsibility of watching their children in a dangerous environment. However, one should also view the request for a playground as the first indication of fulfillment for the Psychological need of Belongingness, specifically friendships, as the residents of El Milagro will view that communal common space of a safe playground as a location to foster and reinforce their sense of community.

The Priority 3 needs return to the bottom tiers of Maslow’s Hierarchy for Physiological and Safety. Specifically, the El Milagro resident’s stated desires for public lighting, a relationship with the electric company, and the need to stop crime/theft are all event-oriented safety and security issues stemming from an incident whereby an individual was killed in El Milagro prior to our arrival. While the residents of El Milagro did not divulge the details of the death, it was clear their desire for lighting at night was a response to that event but also likely reflect a desire to return to normalcy and their pre-flood lives. Recalling the discussion about how handicrafts served as an income stream for the residents of El Milagro prior to the flood, Priorities 4 and 5 can be viewed as supporting needs to help facilitate the basic needs for Safety and Physiological...
fulfillment. It is not until Priority 6 has been reached that the stated needs of the residents of El Milagro finally begin making their way fully off of Maslow’s bottom two tiers, with the need to relocate their families from the jungles/mountains being demonstrative of the Psychological need for Belongingness and Love, and the desire for careers/jobs also slightly hinting at the top-tiered Self-Actualization/Self-Fulfillment need. The last, however, could be interpreted as another means to facilitate income streams to meet the Basic needs of the El Milagro community as well.

Summarizing this analysis, the stated needs of the community of El Milagro are consistent with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and demonstrate that, in this post-crisis situation, the residents of El Milagro viewed fulfillment of their basic needs for Physiological Comfort, Safety, and Security as the most prominent needs in their community. According to Maslow’s theory, the residents of El Milagro must achieve fulfillment in those basic needs before they are able to consider further seeking to meet their psychological needs of belonging and esteem, or their self-fulfillment/self-actualization needs as well.

In addition to sorting and analyzing the data we collected during the Needs-based Assessment of El Milagro, we also captured our initial impressions from the survey, which resulted in several nuanced observations. Joe, my classmate with training in medicinal herbs, noticed the residents of El Milagro had an intense interest in growing plants and herbs and had already began planting small gardens in the remains of their destroyed properties. Similarly, my classmate McKinley observed that many of the residents were still processing the disaster, even though it occurred several months prior, and opined the community members could be experiencing a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Still other classmates observed that even amongst the disaster, inequities existed within the community, as some residents lost everything while others, like Anthony’s family, fared much better. Lastly, several classmates noticed a specific resident of the El Milagro community, a young mother of a infant, appeared to demonstrate signs of malnutrition and “wasting” and recommended an immediate nutritional intervention. It was, in no small part, the result of our collective training in the varied fields of anthropology that allowed my classmates and I to make these nuanced observations while conducting the Needs-based Assessment, which further adds evidence to the assertion that anthropologists are value-added contributors during these processes.
Asset Survey

In the weeks following the Needs-based Assessment, we continued to visit the residents of El Milagro with regularity in order to practice our anthropological trade, all the while building and maintaining rapport with the community and becoming familiar with the residents on an individual basis. Afterward, we developed an Asset-based Survey that was modeled after the survey created by Allen et al. (2002), but with some significant modification to fit what we already knew about the community of El Milagro.

Our survey began with basic demographic data but, after discussing the age, religion, point of origin, and family situation of each interviewee, we quickly moved to establishing what skills and job experience the residents of El Milagro possessed and/or expressed interest in learning. That effort included having the residents describe their work history and the specific certifications they possess, but also included us deliberately asking each interviewee about their experience and/or interest in very specific sub-fields within the areas of the Health Care, Family Care, Office/Clerical work, Construction and Repair, Food Service, Maintenance, Appliance Repair, Transportation, and Arts and Crafts. Furthermore, our survey assessed each resident's view of their own personal strengths and interpersonal skills as well as the obstacles they felt prevented them from achieving their potential/dreams. Lastly, we assessed whether each resident had the material needs to realize their potential and polled them to determine if they had any items which they could loan, rent, or sell to other community members to assist in their neighbor's efforts.

In total, we interviewed 17 residents of El Milagro, 10 of whom were female, with the youngest interviewee being 18 years old and the oldest 61 years of age. Nearly all had some form of education, either Primary or Secondary Schooling, and all had experience in working-class career fields such as construction, farming, sales, home and childcare, and transportation. Two of the residents had experience working as heavy machinery operators, one of whom was a female who, in addition to defying traditional Peruvian livelihood gender roles, also previously worked as a supervisor at an industrial park factory. Fourteen of the 17 respondents had experience with planting and/or gardening, with an additional two expressing interest in learning this skill. Additionally, nine people had experience in commercial cooking, one of which was a male who, along with his spouse, expressed interest in obtaining gastronomical training to fulfill their
dream of opening a restaurant. The community had several members with experience and/or interest in multiple aspects of construction, but had only three residents who had experience with security work (albeit an additional three showed interest). Three respondents indicated they had experience speaking with Government officials, while every interviewee described themselves as being personable. Only one individual admitted to having a lack of communication skills.

The results of the Asset-based Survey demonstrated that the residents of El Milagro possess a significant level of capability with regard to a variety of employable skills, community organizing, and interpersonal communications. However, simply knowing these community assets is not enough. It is important to look further and assess how these assets correlate to the needs of the community. Not only will this address the question of how best this community can move forward post-flood, but will pave the way for creating long-term solutions whereby the community themselves can formulate a strategy to actualize a stable and sustainable recovery.

Identifying the ‘gaps’ between community needs and assets

Regarding the Priority 1 needs, the El Milagro community had several residents who were knowledgeable in agriculture and cooking, so it would stand to reason they had the assets to provide for their own food needs. However, the resident’s experience in agriculture was unable to be brought to bear in El Milagro due to the lack of suitable land on which to grow an appropriate number of crops. It is true that much of the land in El Milagro stood unused after the flooding, but the amount of garbage and pollution carried to El Milagro by the floodwaters rendered the soil unsuitable for agriculture. Therefore, in order to employ the community’s ability to cook and prepare food for the group, they required ingredients and produce and, as a result, those items were the first identified “gap” between with community’s needs and their assets. In addition, material items such as cooking utensils and pots were also gapped items the community required in order to enable food preparation, as was firewood, which was their mainstay cooking heat source. Additionally, while the community had the skills to make blankets and clothing, they lacked the raw materials to do so and, therefore, those items were also included in the inventory of gapped needs as were materials to produce handicrafts to sell and generate income. Finally, the community lacked the ability to produce toiletries in-house and, as a result, required funds to purchase those items.
Similarly, the Priority 2 needs of the community were partially unsynchronized with the assets of the El Milagro residents. Although several of the residents had experience in construction, their stated desire for **tools and construction materials** were un-resourced needs they required in order to capitalize on their talents. Once obtained, however, it would be possible for the residents themselves to construct a park for their children and a cistern/well to secure a reliable water source.

For the seemingly most problematic Priority 3 needs related to bringing physical security to the neighborhood, three residents professed experience in the arena of security albeit one of those respondents was a 16 year old male and none of those with experience and/or interest had any weapons, training, or legal authorities to effectively police the neighborhood against criminal threats. To fulfill this need, the residents require the ability to communicate with local governmental officials and obtain police support, which is problematic due to their uncertain status as squatters on the land. However, because three of the interviewees professed experience working with government officials, the community has the internal capability to work the problems of security and criminality as well as governmental infrastructure support to their sewage, electrical, and educational needs. Furthermore, recalling the discussion regarding the Priority 2 need for tools, the community includes people with experience who can repair the destroyed residences and, if called upon, to construct a school for their children. As such, apart from the already identified gapped or un-resourced need for tools and construction material, the community had the collective talents to tackle all of their stated Priority 3 needs.

Several community members divulged experience in creating and selling handicraft goods during the Asset-based Surveys and, as a result, were capable of internally addressing the Priority 4 need for schooling to make/sell handicrafts if they pooled their collective experience and channeled it into educational opportunities for each other. And while three of the interviewees claimed experience as professional drivers, the community had limited vehicles. As a result, it would be difficult, but not impossible, for the residents of El Milagro to internally coordinate their own transportation needs. However, as the residents resume employment and begin reforming income streams, the need for transportation could reach a long term solution via a combination of the community’s vehicular assets and additional hired taxi services. In the same vein, long term employment and income would likely facilitate the relocation of family members
and help achieve fulfillment in their stated need for jobs and a career, and the already discussed capability to work with government officials would facilitate their ability to receive infrastructure to support a clean water system. Therefore, the community possesses the skills and ability to internally fulfill their Priority 4, 5, and 6 needs.

As a result of this analysis, the Asset-based survey revealed that the talents and skills of the community of El Milagro are largely sufficient to fulfill the majority of the needs they vocalized during the Needs-based Assessment. However, the gapped items of ingredients and produce, cooking pots and utensils, firewood, sewing and handicraft materials, toiletries, and construction tools and materials demonstrate that the residents of El Milagro require a modest amount of external assistance in order to obtain these items that are critical to enabling their own self-reliance.

Conclusion

When working with post-natural disaster victims, which approach is better: the Needs-based Assessment or the Asset-based Survey? With regard to the community of flood victims in El Milagro, using a combination of both methods, independently, appeared to produce the best results. Had we only utilized a Needs-based Assessment to determine the best way to spend our limited donation funding, we would not have fully realized the community’s potential to solve some of their own issues and may have inefficiently expended resources on a problem the community was able to internally resolve. Similarly, if we had used only an Asset-based Survey approach, we may not have understood that the community lacked several items critical not only to their immediate survival, but the material items necessary to facilitate their ability to maximize their own skills and talents as well. By taking a combined approach, we were able to efficiently distribute the donated funding in such a manner that it provided nutritional produce and ingredients for the residents to consume while they began the process of recollecting their lives and bringing their own talents to bear in their recovery. Similarly, five weeks after the start of our data collection and at the conclusion of our field school, we decided to invest funds into providing the female members of the community with start up capital and educational resources. The idea is to host local, professional artisan-led workshops for the women in El Milagro to improve the quality of their craft, which would in turn help them grow their handicraft businesses. Our plan is evidence that the aforementioned combined approach enabled us to expend resources
in a way that both addressed the immediate needs of the disaster affected community and helped facilitate that community's own self-reliant recovery.

However, it is important to note that, throughout these processes, the anthropological insight brought to bear during both surveys and their subsequent analysis played a critical role in navigating a course to the above outcome. For example, it was the anthropological focus of cultural sensitivity when conducting interviews that allowed for the building of rapport and greatly enhanced our ability to receive cooperative information from the residents of El Milagro. Similarly, it was our ability as anthropologists that helped us to understand the nuances at play in the El Milagro community. An understanding of these nuances allowed us to not only properly categorize the residents’ stated needs, but to induce ways that their own disclosed assets could be employed to meet those needs. A good example of how anthropological insight was utilized in this study was our ability to understand the request by the mothers in El Milagro for a playground for their children was not a frivolous request, but rather a need to provide a safe and secure space for their children and, as such, represented one of Maslow’s Basic Needs.

Our experience in El Milagro provided a successful case study in using a combined Needs-Asset approach to determine the most efficient and effective way to allocate limited resources to assist flood victims in Peru, and further demonstrated the usefulness in utilizing anthropologists during this process. I would like to acknowledge and thank both the residents of El Milagro and our cultural advisor Rafael Velasquez for the significant contributions they made to this study and to our broader success in the field school.
Bibliography


