

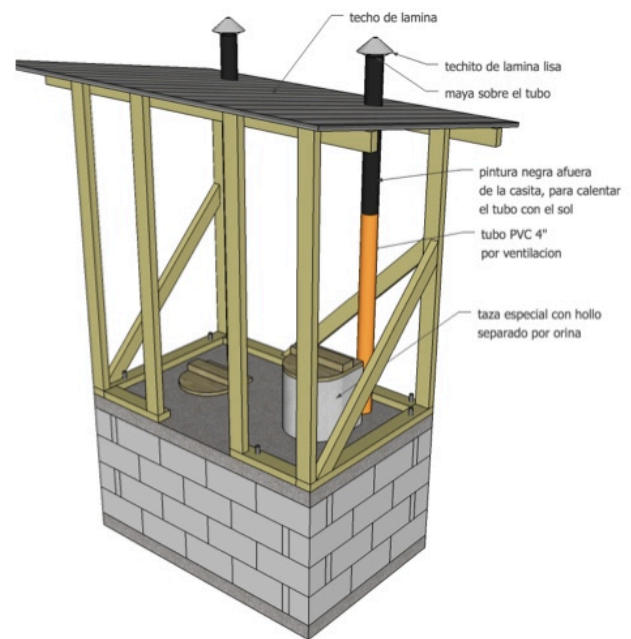
The Project

Guantan is located on the far eastern slope of the mountain chain that divides Unión Cantinil from Northeast to Southwest. The community relies on the yearly coffee harvest as its only form of income, but with rich soils and elevated coffee prices each family is more or less able to keep up with the daily demands of the household. Cash crop farming on such a small scale, though, leaves little for investment into community infrastructure. Having so little, though, does little to dampen the high spirits and hopes of this small community. Above all the Women's Group in Guantan (COMUGUA) is an incredibly active force in the community, and has time and time again, despite their distance solicited talks on a wide range of topics from family planning to self-esteem. The Women's Office here in Unión Cantinil, has fulfilled each request, but when solicitudes for infrastructure projects, specifically funds for latrines, The Women's Office could do little to help as it operates on a budget barely sufficient to pay the salaries of the two women who work there.

The solicitude for latrines from COMUGUA was presented to me after a COMUDE meeting when the community tried, yet again, through normal channels to solicit from the municipality the funds needed to complete this relatively small project. After a series of meetings with COMUGUA, the COCODE of Guantan, and the planning director of Unión Cantinil, we decided that composting latrines, while somewhat more expensive, would be most appropriate given the steep slope of the area, and the largely karst terrain. The community, in agreement, began the paperwork necessary to solicit funds to construct **12 composting latrines**.

The project consists, too, of a series of *charlas* to orient the community in the use and function of composting latrines. While composting latrines are new for the immediate area, there have been implemented in other communities to great success in Guatemala. The latrine is placed above ground and consists of two large chambers where fecal matter actively composts leaving, in the end, a product that can be safely and effectively used as an organic fertilizer. While one chamber is actively being filled, the other is left for 6 months to compost. Some maintenance, though, needs to be done in order to assure quick and effective composting. Chambers must remain relatively dry, urine is diverted to a small ground filter, and saw dust or ash should be applied after every use. This form of active care and maintenance is new for the community, and special care will be paid through a series of *charlas* to make sure that the beneficiaries of these latrines understand the responsibilities that this form of latrine mandates. In addition, the COCODE of Guantan, has agreed to create a committee to oversee the maintenance of the composting latrines and provide continuing education. This committee will be essential to the sustainability of this project in the long term.

With the funds from SPA, we will be able to construct 12 composting latrines starting within the month that we receive payment. Construction should take 23 days with 12 laborers overseen by a mason from community. As my COS date is in late October of this year, I am confident that we will be able to finish the project in the given time, but if the unforeseen does happen, I am more than willing to extend my stay here in Guatemala until which point the construction of these latrines and all required *charlas* have been finished. In addition to my assistance, the director of the planning office of



Unión Cantinil, the technical assistant of the planning office, and the coordinator of the forestry office have all agreed to help orient this project in each of their strengths.

Conclusion

With aid from the small project assistance fund **our goal is to construct 12 functioning composting latrines and give a series of no less than 7 charlas** covering topics from use and maintenance of composting latrines to follow up health education on proper food preparation with the support of the local health center. With this double focused approach in increasing infrastructure and local knowledge we will fulfill our larger goal to help mitigate the rate of gastritis, Guatemala's number one killer, in this small coffee community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erik Benoist', is positioned above the printed name. The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops.

Erik Benoist