

Alice Milligan

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It has now been almost 4 weeks since I left *Pisco Sin Fronteras* amid a flurry of hugs, tears and farewells in broken (but much improved!) Spanish. My final few weeks at PSF were particularly difficult. The thought of leaving was a constant presence at the back of my mind and I really did not feel ready to leave. I stayed on as project leader on the women's clinic project for the rest of my time at PSF and we completed the bricklaying and concrete pours required to finish the reinforced masonry walls. Although I would have loved to see the project on to the next stage of pouring the floor and constructing the roof, it did feel like an appropriate end-point for my involvement with the project.

The bricklaying continued at a fairly quick pace and being a rather methodical process we had a dedicated team of 4 people who worked consistently with the masonry. Another team of 5-6 people worked on preparing the form boards and concrete pours for the reinforced concrete columns which secured the brickwork at critical points and will essentially hold it in place in the event of an earthquake. I can definitely understand how bricklaying involves a 3-year apprenticeship in Britain – we managed to get the walls secured but they certainly weren't pretty! Luckily the next stage of wall-finish will be to add a layer of render both externally and internally, so the non-professional finish we left on the bricks won't be obvious! My last day on-site is perhaps one of my most memorable. Our *maestro*, Eduardo held a small farewell party at his house for me, the other volunteers on the project and the engineer. His family had made *ceviche* (a Peruvian seafood dish) and we had a great evening with the kids, various animals and some impromptu salsa! He had some very kind words about the dedication of the volunteers and the kindness of strangers which unfortunately I was unable to reciprocate through the tears!

My second visit to PSF was infinitely more challenging, eventful, moving and overwhelming than the first. The friendships I developed with other volunteers will stay with me as much as the relationships and memories of the local people I worked with and learned from. In hindsight, I am still not sure that I managed to give as much back to the local community as I took from the experience, my only hope is that my contribution may make life safer, easier or more comfortable for a few of the amazingly resilient people I worked for in my time in Pisco. Personally, my confidence has grown greatly since taking on the project leader role at the women's clinic. I have never been in a position of authority in a workplace before, except unofficially, and this opened my eyes that I can feel comfortable and competent leading other volunteers. Where previously my automatic reaction to encountering a problem was to ask for advice, I was in a position where others were coming to me for advice and I learned quickly that solutions to most issues we encountered on site could be figured out relatively easily if you dedicate the time and energy to them. Of course, working with such an enthusiastic and dedicated team every day made the whole process far easier as well as hugely enjoyable. One of my proudest moments at PSF was when a female volunteer - who was leading the construction of a modular house for a disabled man – approached me and told me that she would not have considered putting herself up for a project leader's role had she not been inspired by seeing me do the same.

Looking back on my initial "project description" which I submitted to JJCF before leaving for Peru, I believe I have indeed gained a much deeper insight into the needs and priorities of

the local people in a post-disaster situation. However, to even label the situation in Pisco as “post-disaster” is itself misleadingly simplified. Four years on from the earthquake one could argue that we are now facing poverty relief, as opposed to disaster relief and therefore long term goals should be altered accordingly, for example moving away from construction of individual dwellings towards community structures such as the women’s clinic. However, this leaves a vast number of people without even basic shelter – I met a number of people who were still living in fabric tents provided in the wake of the earthquake, or houses made of nothing more than reed matting and plastic sheets – just because so much time has passed does this mean they have missed out on upgrading their home? The most basic interventions could make such a difference to a family’s quality of life – a basic bed frame could prevent their children having to sleep on the floor, a concrete floor could prevent a host of respiratory diseases, an additional part-time teacher could greatly improve education facilities and keep the kids off the streets in the daytime. The prioritisation of such needs is something which I believed I understood through research before I left but in reality I have absolutely no idea how such pressing needs can be simplified to a list or a timetable.

I had ideas before I left about the instigation of earthquake-proof technologies and I was particularly interested in the “earth-bag” projects which PSF were developing. However, I now have a reaffirmed belief that adaptations of local techniques are a far more viable option in terms of social acceptance, cost (common building materials are generally more readily available and therefore cheaper) and surprisingly, perceived safety levels (this appears to be a “better the devil you know” situation). Use of reinforced adobe construction is a technique that has been pioneered by structural engineer Marcial Blondet, whom I visited in Lima, and his team at the Catholic University in Lima and they have successfully constructed several thousand homes using this technique in the wider region. However adobe – as a very cheap and unsafe building material in earthquake zones – still has a huge social stigma attached to it and currently local people in the poor neighbourhood of *El Molino* are in the process of demolishing adobe housing (built by another NGO after the earthquake) because they believe it to be unsafe. Clearly, if opinions are to be swayed from the norm, a comprehensive educational and training programme is essential to convince local people of a new method, and even then cultural heritage and social trends may still prevail and result in a preference for a more traditional technique. Therefore I believe the best utilisation of resources is the use of recognisable building materials in a manner which promotes seismic resilience. Whilst I was in Pisco a new president, Ollanta Humala, was voted in amid promises of reconstruction in Pisco so I am cautiously optimistic that this was not mere propaganda and improvements on a larger scale may begin in earnest in the near future.

In the meantime, I have returned to university to my final year of studying architecture. I am still unsure of the role of an architect in a disaster zone but have awakened a certainty that I, as an individual, have a role there. I will soon be embarking into my career as an architect with a reawakened sense of the importance of the quality of the built environment and the delivery of community buildings to the individual and the neighbourhood.

*“Quien no vive para servir, no sirve para vivir.”*