



2025 Panama Project Updates

WEFTA's 2025 work in Panama reflects both the considerable progress made on rural water systems and the growing needs of Indigenous communities across the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé and the Bocas del Toro province. Despite protests that closed roadways for many months and heavy rainfall also making transportation of materials challenging, the WEFTA team and community members persevered.

During the February 2025 circuit-riding trip, WEFTA volunteers Greg Branch and Tess De Los Rios, along with Executive Director Tim Wellman, visited 13 communities between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. The team noted a clear trend: "Every single community we visited mentioned how much their community is growing, that their need for potable water is increasing."

Local leaders expressed deep appreciation for WEFTA's continued engagement. One community member shared that "WEFTA is here to help from their hearts," a sentiment that captures the spirit behind WEFTA's long-term commitment to rural communities in Panama.

WEFTA's 2025 construction season in Panama marked a year of strong progress, close collaboration with community water committees, and the successful completion of several rural water system improvements in the Comarca Ngäbe-Bugle and Indigenous communities in Bocas del Toro. Each project reflects the commitment of local leaders, WEFTA technicians, and long-standing partners who together are strengthening safe water access for families, schools, and entire communities.



Alto Espavé, Comarca Ngäbe-Bugle – System Rehabilitation Completed

In Alto Espavé, WEFTA construction contractor and circuit rider Nicolás Arcia worked closely with the water committee to complete a full rehabilitation of the community water system. Improvements included restoring the main storage tank, rebuilding the spring capture, repairing the transmission line, upgrading distribution connections, and installing air valves and a chlorination system. Nicolás also provided hands-on water committee training to support long-term operations. The renovated system is now functioning reliably and providing more consistent service.



Quebrada Pastor, Bocas del Toro – Strengthening Supply for School and Community

Quebrada Pastor, a large community along the Chiriquí Grande–Almirante road, successfully completed the next phase of its ongoing water system improvements. With more than 650 students and staff at the local school and dozens of households depending on the system, the community worked with Jose Molina, WEFTA’s in-country contractor, WEFTA volunteers, and Engineers Without Borders – NE Ohio Chapter to increase supply reliability. The 2025 phase connected additional spring sources, increased water storage tank capacity, reinforced the transmission line, and improved distribution to both the school and surrounding neighborhoods. These upgrades build on years of collaboration with Peace Corps and local leaders and ensure a more dependable supply during both wet and dry seasons.



Valle Sarón, Bocas del Toro – Improving Service to Homes and the Regional High School

In Valle Sarón, where more than 1,400 people and 700 students rely on the system, WEFTA in collaboration with the local Peace Corps Volunteer, and Jose Molina supported the community in major upgrades to their aging water infrastructure. The 2025 work included spring capture improvements, construction of a new storage tank, and upgrades to more than a mile of distribution line. A dedicated line to the high school now ensures that the school's sanitation facilities—previously unusable due to inadequate water—can function properly. The community played an active role throughout construction and training.



Cerro Brujo, Bocas del Toro – Expanded Storage and System Upgrades

Cerro Brujo, a coastal community on the Tierra Oscura peninsula, completed a series of system renovations that grew out of WEFTA's long-term partnership dating back to 2008. Jose Molina's work included improving waterline bridge crossings, expanding distribution lines, and constructing a new 5,000-gallon storage tank to complement the existing storage tank. The spring sources located in the protected watershed are now scheduled for final renovations following completion of the 2025 improvements. Local leadership and strong committee participation continue to drive the project forward.



San Martín, Bocas de Toro – Water System Construction Completed

In San Martín, near Valle Risco, Jose Molina and the community completed a full construction of the water system. Following the successful capture of a reliable spring source, the team constructed a transmission line, built a new 5,000-gallon storage tank, and completed distribution to all 50 homes. With construction finalized in 2025, the system now provides a consistent supply of potable water. Water committee members received additional training to help them manage the upgraded system effectively.



Kwite – Water System Renovation Amid Heavy Rains

In the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé community of Kwite, WEFTA supported essential repairs led by circuit rider Nicolás Arcia, who worked alongside the water committee during a particularly challenging rainy season. Despite persistent storms and flooding from the nearby river, the team successfully rehabilitated the community's deteriorated spring capture and restored the water storage tank. The improvements stabilized the system, protected the source from contamination, and reestablished consistent flow to households. The project strengthened both the physical infrastructure and the committee's capacity to maintain the system under difficult environmental conditions.



ARAGUAS & University Partnerships – Growing Grassroots Capacity

Another highlight of 2025 was expanding collaboration with ARAGUAS, an emerging Panamanian NGO dedicated to improving rural WASH access. WEFTA, ARAGUAS, and faculty from the Technological University of Panama (UTP) met to explore joint initiatives that connect engineering students with rural community water projects in the Comarca Ngäbe-Bugle. UTP leaders expressed strong enthusiasm for field-based training, building on recent fieldwork in multiple provinces of Panama. Discussions also included potential collaboration with Michigan Tech University and Engineers Without Borders. WEFTA's new partnership network represents a crucial step toward strengthening Panama's long-term WASH capacity and WEFTA's dedication to rural indigenous community WASH health.

