Design a Peace Corps Project

The Setting:
You have just arrived in a Yaqui Indian community in Sonora, Mexico to begin your Peace Corp assignment and your thesis research. Your MI research interests are in volcanology and geological hazards in Mexico and Central America, but the Peace Corps wants you to serve in a community plagued by drought and problems of water scarcity and quality and a water system that is almost non-functional. Your situation is complicated by the fact that although you speak Spanish fairly well, some of the community members speak only Yaqui. In addition, you find that much of the daily business in the community is conducted in Yaqui. Specifically, the PC wants you to work with the community to plan for improvement the existing water delivery system and resolve the problems of households who do not pay their water bills.

Some Background:
Yaqui Indians resisted Spanish and then Mexican control for centuries. Yaquis maintained relative independence, adopting aspects of Spanish culture and technology, and continued their farming of corn, beans, and household vegetables along the fertile valley of the Yaqui River. After much violence in the early 20th century, Yaqui lands came under control of the Mexican government. In the 1950s the government built dams along the river, upstream from Yaqui settlements which severely affected the flow of water for village agriculture. Irrigation districts regulated access to water. In the 1960s the Yaqui valley was the site of the green revolution, which brought industrial mono-crop agriculture to the entire valley. Wheat and eventually vegetables for the U.S. market eventually dominated the landscape. Today, most Yaquis are agricultural workers or commute to nearby cities for wage work. The drought of recent years has made access to domestic water a major problem. In addition, pesticides pollute the water in the irrigation canals.

When you arrive in the region you find a water pump and distribution system that is broken—only operational some times during the year. Households that do not pay their water bills are creating a problem by not funding necessary repairs. In addition, women frequently use the irrigation canals as their source of (free) water. You realize that the aerial spraying of pesticides in nearby fields creates a toxic runoff into canal water ways. In addition, the canals run dry during the summer months. You also notice that households frequently collect their water from community spickets utilizing cast-off pesticide containers from nearby fields. Further, the village nurse at the clinic tells you that there is a high rate of diarrheal disease among children.

Your Assignment:
The PC believes that the major problem with water delivery is the lack of payment of water bills by a large percentage of the households in the village. You assignment is to work with the village officials to find a way to secure household payments and plan for repairs and improvements to a simple water delivery system based upon a community pump and delivery by pipes to a water spicket outside each household.
Workshop Exercise

Break down into groups of 3-4 and discuss how a Peace Corp volunteer would approach this assignment. Here is where you would utilize what you have learned about doing qualitative research to answer a complex problem. Discuss how you would answer the following three questions:

1. **What types of information would you need to collect in the village to begin to design and carry out your solution to this assignment?**

2. **How would you go about gathering this information?**

3. **Who would you talk to and what types of questions might you ask village members or different sectors of the village population?**