

CASE STUDY

El Salvador: Analysis of water decentralization



Summary

El Cerrito Canton community has spent decade attempting to get access to clean water. Action was taken to organise a Community Development Association, leading to the execution of a potable water project. The key insight drawn from this case is that, it is key for communities to have water access and management is their capacity to get organised.

Background

El Cerrito Canton community is made up by more than 400 families. About half of the population lives in rural areas and the potable water access coverage in rural areas is only 26.17%. For more than 40 years, this community tried to obtain access to potable water through several governmental and nongovernmental organizations. In this long and difficult process, the community got organized in a Community Development Association (ADESCO) and succeeded with the execution of other farming and credit projects; and in the year 2000, they finally succeeded in the execution of a potable water project through CARE-Project AGUA.

The persistence of this community, how they used the social capital to improve their living standards, and how they currently manage their potable water system deserves high praise.

It is worth mentioning that within the user charges they are paying for the “water environmental service” in addition to paying for the operation and maintenance costs of the system. Part of that payment is intended for water resource conservation and catchment.

Finally, this case is a sustainable community management model within the context of the national discussion on decentralization and private sector participation in potable water service supply and sanitation that is currently taking place in the country.

Actions taken

The community followed procedures after the participatory Rural Diagnosis with Project AGUA was concluded and executed the potable water project through CARE's Water Access, Management and Efficient Use project executed in partnership with the Foundation for Municipal Development -FUNDAMUNI. Mayor's Office of Usulután provided different types of support to the El Cerrito Community: when the El Cerrito Community was granted assistance for the potable water project through CARE Project AGUA, the municipality contributed with \$24,000.00 (representing approximately 8% of the total cost of the project).

These funds were used to finance the three-phase line for the electric installation of the pump since the project consisted of a well and electric pumps. Additionally, 80% of the population benefited from house electric energy service. Finally, the Mayor's Office granted legal status to the El Cerrito Canton Community Potable Water Managing System Association -ACASAPEC. Actions executed by CARE: In 1996, CARE through its project Credit for Sustainable Agriculture and the work carried out by CENTA with El Cerrito community's ADESCO, started actions in such canton granting a revolving fund of

\$5,714.00 in the first year, ending with a total of \$24,343.00. In 1999 the project Water Access, Management and Efficient –AGUA was started in the 18 priority municipalities of US AID, among which is Usulután; it was executed by the CARE Consortium in partnership with three local NGOs. The Project has 5 components:

1. Local Development;
2. Basin and Agro-Forestry Management;
3. Infrastructure;
4. Environmental Education;
5. Water Resource Management -Incidence.

Outcomes

decentralized rural potable water system for 351 families (2,106 people), as a local experience in the solution of conflicts related with water access and resources channeling.

These results were achieved through the formation of strengthened and legitimized local organizations implementing a micro basin management as recognition to the environmental service of the water and as a product of an environmental education process at all levels. It was possible to establish sustainable rural potable water management and administration system models with a comprehensive vision of the resource (economic, social and environmental vision).

El Cerrito community improved its quality of life by having access to potable water, electric energy, improving their access roads, and improving the health and education of their children. In the incidence processes, it was possible to link the local actors, social sectors and different water users in debate and incidence processes including proposals for the legal framework of the water sector at national level.

Lessons Learned

The key for poor communities to have water access and management is their capacity to get organized, their tenacity, clarity of objectives, attitude and community leaders' willingness to be of service, human capital building, and better use of social capital.

The rural potable water systems can be managed by community organizations in a sustainable way but it is necessary to link these efforts at national level.

Such local managing entities are recognized and obtain legal status based on equity to have access to and use the water efficiently.

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