

Challenges in the Implementation of Sustainable Water Projects from the Perspective of Water For People

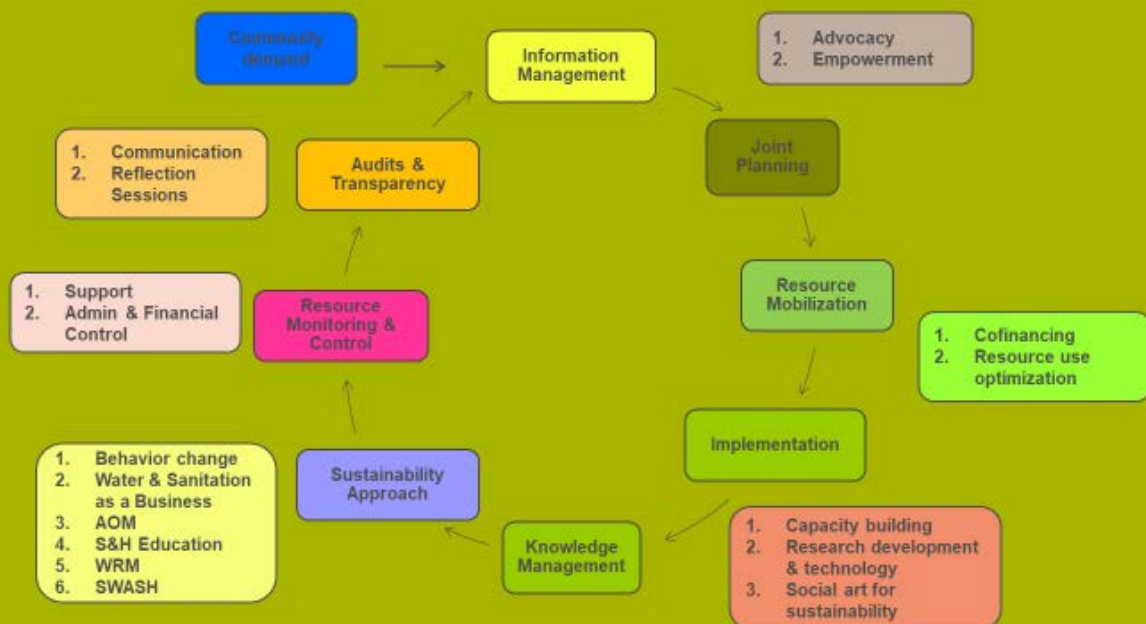
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Work Experience

The involvement of Water For People in Guatemala, in 4 Quiche municipalities, includes 8 working strategies to achieve universal access to water and sanitation services in a sustainable manner:

1. Information management
2. Joint planning
3. Resource mobilization
4. Implementation
5. Knowledge management
6. Sustainability approach
7. Resource monitoring and control
8. Audits and transparency

Work Model in Guatemala



Each one of these strategies has its own challenges.

Information Management

Information management in the sector is sparse, and there are no reliable sources that allow for decision making in accordance with needs. In addition to this, the selection of projects to be promoted is politicized, since projects are determined on the basis of each community's vote. On the other hand, it is difficult for community leaders to think of water and sanitation services as a true need. Based on the former, it is necessary to institutionalize information about water and sanitation from the perspective of coverage and levels of service so that this information adequately corresponds to the needs of the public and of the nation in a platform that addresses local, national, and global context in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). With regard to the municipal sector, the institutionalization of the Municipal Water and Sanitation Offices is necessary.

Joint Planning

In relation to joint planning, it is challenging to determine the constitutional allocation that municipalities have in executing water and sanitation projects. This year in particular there has been a substantial delay because the 2017 budget remains in effect, and this causes difficulties in the allocation of funds to certain projects. The overlap in the allocation of projects by government institutions and municipalities corresponds to different criteria for prioritization, which negatively affects consistency in planning in terms of the organization. For that reason, it is necessary to share criteria for prioritization to plan and implement projects.

Resource Mobilization

In reference to mobilization of resources, it's very difficult to lack the resources to implement systems or projects, since the contributions for certain system components are problematic, primarily for chlorine treatment systems and water metering systems. The perceived corruption in the application of projects by some municipalities affects this process. The commitments or agreements that are signed with the authorities are often not fulfilled as agreed. Although this also occurs with community contributions, it is less frequent. As a result, it is appropriate that the allocations of contributions be made according to the agreed upon planning and schedule.

Implementation

Regarding the implementation strategy, difficulties are found in different perspectives such as deficiencies in plans and designs for each intervention, as they are sometimes overvalued, copied or incomplete. On the other hand, skilled labor is limited in some intervention areas. Communication routes and natural disasters affect the execution times of projects. Leaders that are biased towards partisan politics tend to delay the social processes that are implemented in projects. Rights of way and community conflicts are elements that carry weight in certain locations, since they raise prices and tend to shorten or limit the execution of the systems. The use of chlorinators and water meters are elements that are viewed negatively in some communities. Coordination with those from outside the region can affect the implementation, since some outsiders implement without following municipal planning. This process would benefit from an intervention model, agreed upon among institutions, for the intervention of Water and Sanitation.

Knowledge Management

In terms of knowledge management, the difficulty is evident from the perspective that there is still a need to promote knowledge networks to apply contextual knowledge. It is necessary to work with protocols that accelerate the acceptance or promotion of methodologies that advance government work in hygiene, water, or sanitation activities. The academic community must be involved in the management of research into methodologies and technologies related to the improvement of water and sanitation coverage impacting public health.

Sustainability Approach

In relation to sustainability, challenges arise in the need to see its importance in financial and programmatic aspects of this approach. The establishment of a fee to cover the costs of Administration, Operation and Maintenance (AOM), plus a percentage recovery charge, is a challenge for communities, as they are not able to pay this tariff. This is aggravated by the political, partisan decisions of some authorities that do not support this approach. In addition, this concerns application paradigms and different positions of power, since there are no criteria that allow us to prioritize strategies by subject. Creativity is important, and comprehensive applications can be an element of facilitation and support to sustainability.

Resource Monitoring and Control

Regarding monitoring and control of resource use, the challenge is the quality of information collected and provided by interviewees. It is recommended to have a nationwide guideline that allows for the same perspective, perhaps guided by the SDG. Regarding audits and transparency, the challenge is aimed at generating trust to empower and advocate for participants. This creates the capacity within the committees to carry out efficient and transparent management of the economic resources of the system they administer. The transfer of operational knowledge from one committee to another (when changes occur) is a challenge to overcome.

Audits and Transparency

Combined with the above, it is pertinent to mention that the weak institutional framework is not capable of responding to the needs of the sector in general, from the perspective of stewardship, watchfulness, financing strategies and control of systems in general terms. For this reason, it is essential to formalize an intervention model that allows any entity (governmental or non-governmental) to apply it in any context and time frame, following the principles of universal and fair access in order to provide services in a sustainable and transparent manner.