

Leveraging Political Influence into Action on Water and Sanitation Issues in Guatemala

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Political influence refers to the efforts, activities, and actions that an organized citizenry uses to influence the creation and implementation of policy and public programs through persuasion and influence on government authorities, international financial organizations, and other institutions with decision making power over important issues for specific groups or society in general (WOLA, 2002).

Given that context in each country is distinct, it's important to consider the opportunities and obstacles that make up that context. Consequently, it's important to identify external influences such as the democratic openness, equity, decentralization, access to media, and transparency, among others. Regarding internal aspects, it's important to take into account the organizational structure that exists among institutions that affect public policy, their willingness to work with the government, the formation of new alliances, the vision of this process amidst a global strategy of long term change, and the focus of the group's or coalition's mission. Factors to be combined with the preceding include the basic management of State institutional knowledge, knowledge of the current political climate, information handling, and ability to investigate. It's important that the people who drive the initiative have clear agreements about the availability to contribute both human and economic resources to the initiative.

In order to increase the probability of success in the journey toward universal water and sanitation service in Guatemala, it's necessary to undertake reflection and analysis exercises that guide the process in a concrete way, and as part of this, the first priority must be to identify and analyze the problem. At this point, it's important to remember that the lack of water and sanitation services in Guatemala has a significant impact on many aspects of the lives of the citizenry, which primarily includes groups defined by being rural, indigenous, poor, women, physically disabled, and elderly.

In regard to the proposal: A proposal has been crafted to modify the municipal Code to include institutionalizing the provision of water and sanitation services in districts through District WASH Offices (Oficinas Municipales de Agua y Saneamiento, or OMAS). This proposal seeks to improve the opportunities for people to access these services and to increase the proportion of people served, eventually reaching the entire population. Additionally, it aims to improve district finance by accounting for urban users that are behind on their bills, which can be regulated with adequate systems for charging and providing services. It's important to realize that municipalities are responsible to provide services to low income neighborhoods, as a result, this modification is important to municipal districts, and therefore, it's an important action to uphold this responsibility.

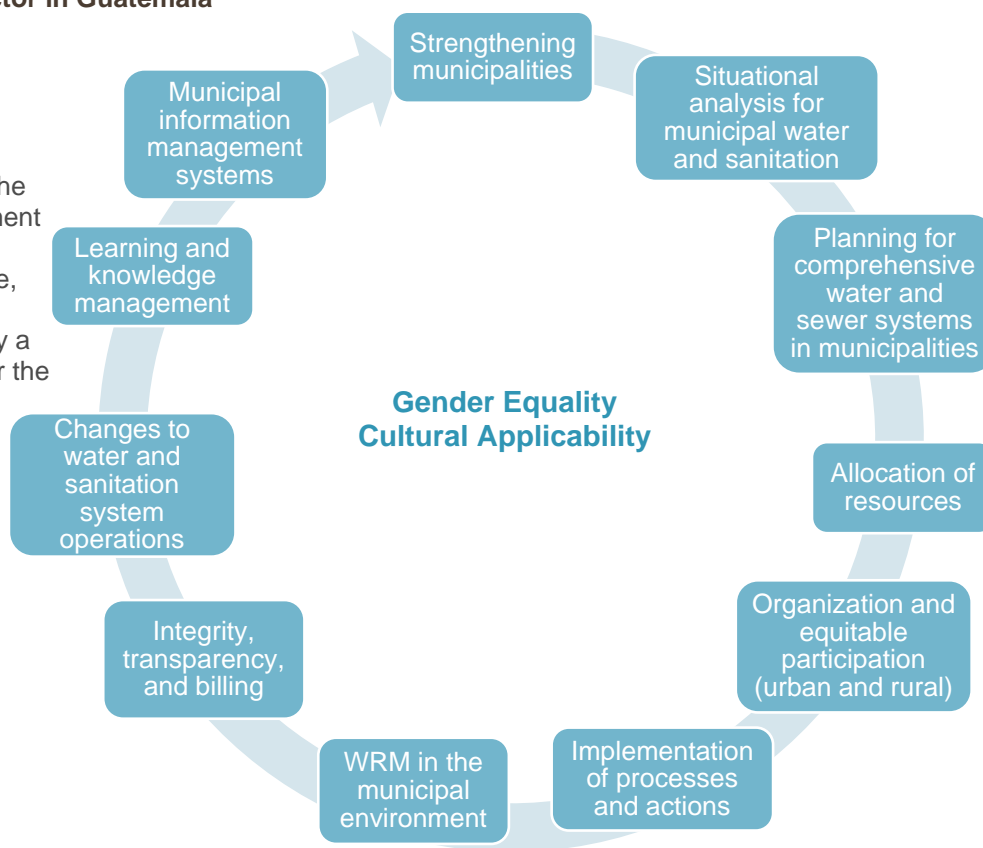
This proposal includes the approach for implementation of a model for water, sanitation, and hygiene services. This model, which seeks to provide coverage and sustainability, suggests diverse principles for implementation such as: ease of implementation, flexibility, comprehensiveness, oriented toward universal coverage of services, sustainability, societal change, promotes system wide solutions, and promotes empowerment.

In addition, as shown in Figure 1, consisting of eleven components and two cross axis including gender equity and cultural application.

Figure 1: Municipal implementation model for water, sanitation, and hygiene promoted as the key to reforming the sector in Guatemala

Municipal Implementation Model for WASH

Objective: Increase the sustainable management of potable water sanitation and hygiene, so that municipal governments guaranty a better quality of life for the urban and rural population.



Work Path

Regarding the actual process, there were ups and downs, but the short story is it was a journey of many steps and actors that were involved during this exercise.

The network structure in water and sanitation and the Potable Water Sub-commission of the Secretary of Food and Nutrition in Guatemala

Coordination, discussion, and reminders have been key elements in pushing along the work path. In this way, several processes of analysis, consent, and defining of the work strategy elements have been accomplished. The health, nutrition, and budgetary situation was analyzed surrounding the water supply and sanitation systems which have been the bottlenecks that routinely confront the government and the instances in which these actions have been taken to a national level.

Based on this diagnosis, the country's situation was also analyzed, and the challenges that arise are the ODS and the government's plan, in the framework of the normal circumstances and the potential for implementation.

At this point it was necessary to identify the actions that contributed to defining a plan with responsibilities and deadlines that contributed to obtaining measurable results such as consultants developing a model, technologies used, data gathering that has an impact on the Congress of the Republic and government entities that participate by law in actions related to the water and sanitation sector as well as helping to inform, empower actors, and mobilize them to take action from a national perspective.

The networks with their resources and contributions from various members have been paramount in attaining the desired results and among these are the mapping of actors, proposals to modify the Municipal Code, roadmap to sustain the work of the government actors and the municipal implementation model for water sanitation and hygiene.

Champions of the process

In the governmental arena turnover is expected among government officials which leads to highs and lows that complicate predictable work paths and brings new challenges, it can also be a force for good or bad in the progress along the effective path. Changes that have occurred include changes in the presidency of the Instituto de Fomento Municipal (INFOM) (Institute for Promotion of Municipalities), the retiring of the Secretaría de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional (SESAN) (Secretary of Food and Nutritional Security), change in deputies of the Comisión de Salud del Congreso de la República (Health Commission of the Congress of the Republic), changes among mid-level positions that support the technical proposal among others.

These changes either hold back or favor the process depending on the interests and the established purposes for the political changes and impacts that benefit the country. However, there are those that follow through on their promises and help the process to continue such as: deputies that have raised awareness around the idea and that continue to push through the process, some of these are authorities from SESAN, INFOM, Secretaría General de Planificación (SEGEPLAN) General Secretary of Planning and the Ministry of Public Health, which give supplies and motivate so that the process continues.

In this sense, it's also appropriate to mention that there are networks and associations such as Global Water Partnership (GWP), the Red de Agua y Saneamiento (RASGUA) (Guatemala Network of Water and Sanitation), Asociación Guatemalteca de Ingeniería Sanitaria (AGISA) (Guatemala Association of Sanitary Engineers) continue to support with knowledge and experience that enrich approaches and proposals to improve the institutional and financing of the topic of water and sanitation in Guatemala.

On the other hand, there are examples of the UN system, such as UNICEF and OMS-OPS which have supported with funding and knowledge to move the work plans forward. In addition to these, there are non-governmental organizations such as Water for People, Helvetas, CARE and others with have actively contributed in various moments to contribute in specific results.

Where we are now

A national meeting was set up for municipalities where their OMAS participated, during which municipalities spoke with high level leaders from the executive and legislature, also incorporating the participation of the Asociación Nacional de Municipalidades (ANAM) (National Association of Municipalities) and other cooperative sectors such as GIZ from Germany.

There is room to grow in this process including the work to convince more deputies of other commissions that deal with approval such as the urbanization commission, commission of natural resources and environment, as well as actors in the executive branch.

The Governmental Accord was approved in April of 2018 regarding the Unity of monitoring the topic of potable water and sanitation number 78-2018, this opens doors bringing the topic to the forefront of discussion.

With the change of authorities of INFOM, reform is being promoted in the WASH sector and we propose to approach this discussion and process to generate more support for the topic of institutionalization of support, financing, and sustainability of these services.