

OMAS as a Social Change Entity in the Municipality of San Bartolomé Jocotenango, Guatemala C.A

By: Cristobal Pérez Oxlaj
Sustainability Manager
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Background

Attempts to bring order water management have failed. Since 1983, several water law projects have been presented in Congress and none have passed. Nevertheless, new proposals continue to emerge to establish institutionalization.

Today a municipal code reform proposal is before the Congress of the Republic, decree 12-2002 to institutionalize services under the Office of Municipal Water and Sanitation (OMAS, for the Spanish acronym).

The lack of oversight in the water and sanitation sector is a stumbling block to advancing the processes that non-government organizations promote in the country. As a result, municipalities don't assume their role as service provider and institutionalize these efforts.

Regarding the provision of water and sanitation service, it is the responsibility of municipalities, once the municipal code is modified by decree No. 12-2002 with its amendments. Nevertheless, the task has remained unfinished despite the efforts of the sector.

The municipality of San Bartolome Jocotenango of the Quiché department, one of the municipalities covered by Water For People, was prioritized because of the poverty indexes and low water and sanitation service coverage.



Water For People started its activities in 2009, with a research and data analysis process of water and sanitation coverage. This included coordinating activities with municipal personnel, specifically with the Director of Municipal Planning. However, sustainability was not incorporated into the process. As a result, it became necessary to dedicate a technical office to the topic of water and sanitation.

Solution

As a foundation of the Everyone Forever strategy, municipalities must adopt process sustainability. Consequently, by 2012 municipal authorities were exposed to the importance of opening an office dedicated to the municipality's water and sanitation activities. After several meetings, the council decided to open an office in accordance with a municipal agreement and hire an operator. It was negotiated that at first the municipality would pay 43% of the operator's salary and 57% would be paid by Water For People, gradually decreasing until the municipality covers the entire 100%. The council hired Rafale Calel Us, as operator of the OMAS.

In addition to the functions of operator, he was trained in water and sanitation concepts: administration, operation and maintenance (O&M) of systems, water quality, tariff analysis using the AtWhatCost tool, basic sanitation technologies, monitoring, management, and influence.



Native of the municipality, studied Environmental Engineering, speaks kiché.

Positive Results from OMAS Work

It was determined the office would have three functions: technical, strategic, and influence.

Technical

Over the last three years, the OMAS completed its tariff analysis with service providers using the AtWhatCost tool. 22 of 27 systems were analyzed, and 10 providers have improved tariffs for better O&M and replacement.

85% of the systems were sampled for microbiological analysis, specifically to detect E. coli and total coliforms. The OMAS also trained municipal service providers, including new and old projects, in topics of service sustainability and water quality. It accompanied providers during the installation of chlorine dosing units. Following 2018 monitoring, water quality improved 63% free from E. Coli and total coliforms.

Strategic

The OMAS has been fundamental in auditing processes of the General Account Comptroller, in presenting water and sanitation operations. One of the actions of the operator has been raising awareness and technical assistance to the city council, and one of the successes has been for the council to allocate financial resources for water projects. Furthermore, a study in the prevention and treatment of waste water and solid waste was completed.

The OMAS managed the purchase of basic bacteriological equipment which utilizes a membrane filtration method to detect E. coli and total coliform according to established methods in the Guatemalan Technical Rule 29001. This standard allows the OMAS to complete in situ analysis with low costs.

Influence

The OMAS successfully coordinated activities with technical personnel in the health department to improve water quality in the municipality.



Furthermore, JICA operates a program to strengthen the capacity of local government. Through the leadership of Rafael, they have coordinated efforts directly with the OMAS. As a result of the coordination efforts, Rafael traveled to Tokyo, Japan for a two week training in a Japanese methodology. Today, this methodology is used for the processes of training families in the concepts of sanitation and hygiene in the home.

Success Factors

Innovation

The OMAS completed the bacteriological analysis, and it has had a positive impact. The result of the analysis has contributed to providers gradually accepting water chlorination. To date, there are seven systems with a chlorination unit compared to three years ago, when the idea of chlorination seemed impossible to providers.

The role of Water For People has been strengthening the municipality through the OMAS. These actions go hand in hand with the training, technical assistance, and accompanying the operator in accomplishing his assigned roles.

Today, the OMAS manages tools such as the Everyone Forever plan, Asset Analysis, and Local Water Resources Management Plans. One of the fundamental aspects to accomplish these objectives is a passion for the work and commitment to goals for the municipality.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The function of the office depends on the allocation of adequate budget and time. The principal problem is that council management is deficient in several areas. The one who makes decisions about distribution of the general budget is the financial director, and for him, the topic of water and sanitation is not a priority.

Despite this, Rafael knows how to push those who allocate resources, leveraging the obligations of the municipality to provide water chlorination as established in the municipal code. Furthermore, the General Account Comptroller implements audit processes related to financial execution and water and sanitation topics. Also, it is certain that while these audits are still lacking, they contribute to the authorities being interested in doing something. The challenge is reaching Everyone with adequate levels of service in the municipality.

Advice for everyone

Rafael recommends:

- It is necessary that the office operators know the details of the current legislation related to the topics of water and sanitation. This allows for affecting change with the municipal council more efficiently.
- Coordination is important between the institutions of government linked to water and sanitation.
- Knowing how to navigate the political, technical and social arenas in daily work.