

Water For People's system strengthening efforts led to significantly improved and sustained water service delivery in Asunción, Perú

In the northern rural district of Asunción, Perú, [Water For People's](#) system strengthening efforts have contributed to remarkably improved water service delivery that is being sustained over time. Over a nine year period (2013 to 2021), Water For People addressed various underperforming factors in the water system in Asunción, including planning and financing universal services, finance for operations and maintenance (O&M), and skills building of district water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) offices and service providers.

Full case study here

Through these interventions, Water For People has demonstrated that improving key factors in the WASH system with local actors can contribute to sustained service delivery levels over time. Despite the potential risks to resilience, the current state of the water sector in Perú should provide a favorable environment to sustain and scale the results achieved in Asunción.



Operator of the drinking water system in the Llimbe community of Asunción (Water For People).

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 From 2013 to 2019, the percentage of unserved households* in Asunción decreased **from 17% to 3%**. Further, **overall service delivery levels have been maintained at intermediate or high levels.**
- 2 As a result of a better informed and more willing district government, planning and financing of new infrastructure for households who were previously unserved has covered the entire district of Asunción.

14%
DECREASE
IN PERCENTAGE
OF UNSERVED
HOUSEHOLDS

- 3 Due to formal training and informal mentoring, two key performance changes of system factors occurred over time: better management and technical skills of the district WASH office (DWO) staff and evidence-based regulations for rural water tariffs.
- 4 Taken together, these performance changes in planning, financing, and skills building have contributed to key behavior changes at the service delivery level, leading to more people accessing sustained services.

*Unserved households are defined as the percentage of households who do not have access to improved water services.

CASE STUDY FOCUS

Water For People's baseline data in 2013 confirmed that each community in Asunción had some level of water service, yet **17% of households remained unserved**. From then onwards, Water For People undertook several key activities to support the district government to plan for, finance, and conduct skills building to help the district achieve universal service.

For this case, a team of consultants analysed systems changes across two types of related changes: behavior and performance changes. Behavior changes are highlighted in the white boxes and describe changes to who did what, and how they did it. Performance changes are highlighted in the yellow boxes to describe what changed and how much it changed (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: THEORY OF CHANGE

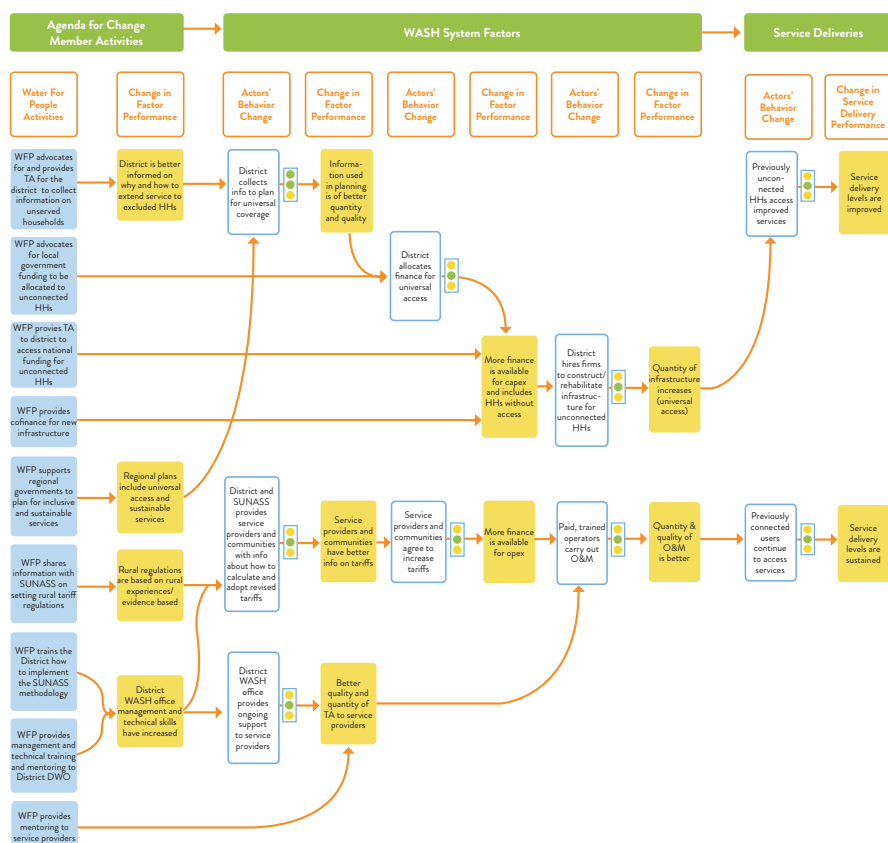
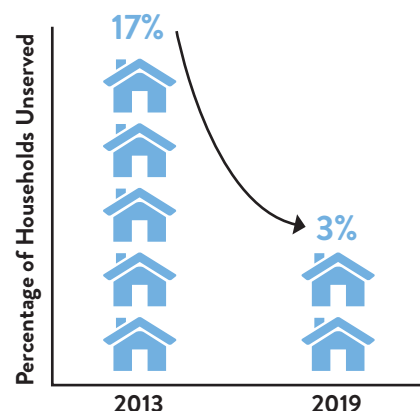


Figure 1. Theory of change developed for this case study, with traffic light assessments of scale (top), ownership (middle), and resilience (bottom).

KEY FINDINGS - OVERALL

From 2013 to 2019, the percentage of unserved households in Asunción **decreased from 17% to 3%**. Further, **overall service delivery levels have been maintained at intermediate or high levels**.



Picturesque landscape of Asunción's main square and its famous palm trees (Water For People).

FINDINGS - PLANNING AND FINANCE FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICES

Over the period from 2013 to 2018, Water For People undertook several key activities to support the district government to plan and finance universal services, including:

- Advocated for and provided technical assistance for the district to collect information on unserved households.
- Advocated for local government funding to be allocated to unserved households for self-supply or multi-family water schemes.
- Provided technical assistance to the district to access national funding for unserved households to be included in new or rehabilitated piped networks, where feasible.
- Offered to partially finance new infrastructure for unserved dispersed rural households.

As a result, the district government was better informed on how and why to extend services to excluded households. Subsequently, the DWO coordinated with the Project Development Office, the Office for Rural and Urban Development, and the Planning and Budgeting Office to extend first time access to unserved households, leveraging finance from Water For People and national government sources.

Due to better quantity and quality of information available, the DWO was able to plan for universal water access.



SCALE

The information, planning, and financing of new infrastructure for households covers the entire district of Asunción. A scale-up phase is currently underway now in 13 additional districts.



OWNERSHIP

The Asunción district government invested in the personnel costs to collect this information, hiring two external consultants for a four-month period. The scale up districts where this task has already begun have also borne the costs of data capture.



RESILIENCE

Efforts are underway to transfer from districts to the regional government, but it is too soon in the implementation of the scale-up phase to determine how viable that approach will be.

The quantity of finance options available to reach universal access also increased due to better planning and information.



SCALE

These activities covered the entire district of Asunción and are the logical next step in the 13 other districts once the information gathering and planning exercises have been completed.



OWNERSHIP

Of the infrastructure projects planned with the information collected on unserved households, the district financed an estimated 42%. ^[1] Additional finance came from users, Water For People, and national government programs.



RESILIENCE

Finance from national government is available for water infrastructure, but many of the investments needed to ensure universal access are too small to access federal funding. There is a potential risk that the national funding landscape could change, but until now this funding has remained intact, suggesting that the water sector remains high on the national political agenda.

FINDINGS - SKILLS AND FINANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE SERVICES

Increasing the knowledge and skills of both service authorities and service providers has been a key area of work for Water For People since the start of their interventions in Asunción in 2013. Advocating for increased finance for sustainable services through higher tariffs and ongoing support to service providers has complemented the knowledge and skill building activities.

A summary of activities undertaken by Water For People includes:

- Management and technical training and mentoring to the DWO personnel on sector-wide planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes.
- Training and mentoring of service providers.
- Shared information with the national regulator, SUNASS, on setting rural tariff regulations.



Reading of a household micrometer. (Water For People)

As a result of formal training and informal mentoring, two key performance changes occurred: better management and technical skills of the DWO staff and evidence-based regulations for rural water tariffs.

A more informed and skilled DWO has contributed to improved technical assistance to service providers.



SCALE

The team of four people in the DWO allows them to cover the entire district, which is an extensive area with dispersed communities and households. Information was not available as to whether the quantity and quality of support to service providers in the scale up districts has changed yet.



OWNERSHIP

Direct support costs have been covered entirely by the district for the last four years. Baseline investment in direct support was an estimated USD 15,000 in 2013 and has increased to over USD 72,000 in 2020, per Water For People's Sustainable Services Checklist tool.²



RESILIENCE

The DWO initially received training and information from Water For People and still benefits from ongoing mentoring, though evolving roles have led to more involvement from regional government to provide ongoing training or upskilling. Due to regional capacity limitations and frequent personnel changes, efforts are also underway in the sector to certify DWO staff.

Water For People has worked with SUNASS and the DWO to train rural water service providers and users on the importance of tariffs.



SCALE

As of 2020, 78% of the service providers and communities in the district have received this training from the district. The scale-up districts have not yet begun this exercise.



OWNERSHIP

This function is carried out by a DWO representative in coordination with a representative of SUNASS (national regulator). This position has been fully financed by the district for the last four years, including through changes in government administration.



RESILIENCE

Should retraining of DWO staff in the tariff-setting methodology be necessary due to personnel changes, the regional government is positioned to play this role.

Now that service providers and communities have better information on tariffs, and more finance is available for O&M, an agreement was reached by all parties to increase tariffs.



SCALE

75% of the service providers and communities in Asunción have agreed to increase their tariffs after participating in the training workshops. The scale-up districts have not yet begun this exercise.



OWNERSHIP

Users in Asunción appear to be paying their tariffs, with Water For People monitoring showing that 80% of service providers have default rates of less than 10%, compared to the regional average default rate of nearly 20%.



RESILIENCE

In practice there are no sanctions should users decide not to pay increased tariffs. Thus, the final decision on tariff rates is negotiated between service providers and users, with the goal that better informed parties will decide to increase their tariffs if they are not already covering the costs of O&M.



Handwashing station at the Manuel Gonzáles Prada school in Asunción (Water For People).

ABOUT THE CASE STUDY

You can read the full Water For People case study [here](#).

Agenda for Change supports its members to deliver systems change and document and share their experiences in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sectors. As part of that overall effort, the Global Hub contracted a team from the [Springfield Centre](#) and [Aguaconsult](#) to test and apply an approach to three cases involving Agenda for Change members. Water For People in Perú is the second case.

Further guidance on how to apply the approach, and a summary of lessons learned from the process, will be forthcoming.

Authors: Kate Fogelberg (Springfield Centre), and Harold Lockwood (Aguaconsult)

¹ Water For People, 2021, 'Project consultation report.' Unpublished.

² Water For People, Sustainable Services Checklist, 2021, unpublished.