



CASE STUDIES FOR CHANGE

 **KEY FINDINGS**

- Concentrating effort in a limited number of municipalities reduced the transaction costs and enabled economies of scale.
- To ensure sustainability, the programme built institutional capacity not only among service providers, but also among agencies outside the community that have on-going responsibility for supporting and monitoring service providers post-construction.
- The lack of on-going financing mechanisms to cover large-scale maintenance and extension costs may limit the sustainability of services.

The NGO Water For People had been working on sporadic water and sanitation projects in Honduras since 1998 without seeing the kind of impact they wanted. In 2006 they changed their approach to concentrate on achieving full water and sanitation coverage in a just few municipalities, enabling them to achieve economies of scale, leverage the efforts of other organisations active in those areas, and build up the supporting institutions that would ensure sustainability. This approach is reflected in the organisation’s slogan ‘Everyone, Forever’.

This case study describes the application of this approach in the municipality of Chinda, Honduras. This small rural municipality consists of the town of Chinda and 14 vil-lages and hamlets, and has a population of some 5,800 inhabitants. When the Water For People programme started in Chinda, in 2007, water infrastructure coverage was high at 91%. However, service levels were low, with limited continuity of supply and crumbling infrastructure. Sanitation coverage barely reached 61%. Most water supply systems were managed by water committees, which acted as community-based service providers, but were not established as legal entities. The Municipal Association of Water Committees (AJAM)—an umbrella organisation for the water committees—was responsible for supporting members and acting as interlocutor with the municipality.



Before, we did sporadic projects that didn't have much impact"

Allan Torres, Country Director, Water For People Honduras

APPROACH: EVERYONE, FOREVER

EVERYONE

The Water For People programme in Chinda aimed to achieve 100% water and sanitation coverage for all households, schools and health centres through a participatory approach to infrastructure development, linked to the development of local organisational capacity. In contrast to previous approaches, the programme sought to achieve scale by leveraging contributions from communities and the municipality, and by coordinating with others agencies investing in the municipality.

FOREVER

To achieve sustainability, the programme focused on a number of elements to strengthen local capacity, not only at the level of the service provider, but also at the other institutional levels, to enable them to support service provision in the future. These elements included:

- **Professionalisation of service providers.** The programme provided training to water committees in the operation, maintenance and administration of the services. It also supported them to achieve legal status.
- **Building capacity to provide support at the municipal level.** The municipality committed itself to establishing a municipal water and sanitation technical unit to provide post-construction follow-up support to service providers. The Water For People programme helped train the municipal technician and equip the unit.
- **Alliances with other support agencies.** The programme sought to foster strategic alliances with other agencies that could provide support once full

coverage was achieved. These included technicians from SANAA (the National Autonomous Water and Sewerage Service), the Health Secretariat, and the District Education Office. The programme also worked with partners to develop water catchment protection activities by buying land and establishing protected zones in the upper catchment areas.

- **User awareness.** The programme worked to raise user awareness of the level of service to which they were entitled, the financial contribution they needed to make, and their responsibility for maintenance and replacement of household sanitation facilities.
- **Payments for services.** The programme promoted the implementation of national policy under which users pay a tariff to cover operational costs, based on projected operational expenditure. This is typically in the order of 25 Lempiras (US\$1.30) per month.

RESULTS: COVERAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

EVERYONE: COMPLETE COVERAGE, BETTER SERVICE

In 2010, the final water system in Chinda was completed. All villages and hamlets in the municipality now have functional, gravity-fed, piped water systems with household connections, and service levels meet basic standards that are acceptable to local people. As the initial coverage was high, most of the works consisted of system extensions, rehabilitation and replacements. A municipal by-law now requires new



We are making a new pit, as this pit is already full. As I am responsible for this latrine, as it is mine, I must look after it so that the benefits of it continue."

Rosaura Rivera, El Tule community





There is commitment to follow up with the water systems and water committees that were established”

Francisco Perdomo, former municipal water and sanitation technician

houses to be connected to the water system. This is facilitated by payment schemes to cover the connection costs.

Full sanitation coverage was also achieved and sanitary blocks were installed in all 12 schools in Chinda. The latrines provide an intermediate level of service (pour-flush toilets, with ‘modern’ toilet bowls and soak-away pits).

FOREVER

Local institutional capacity

Trained water committees are now in place for all water systems, although a few have yet to attain legal status. These service providers now meet basic management requirements, including basic book keeping, reporting and informing the user community. The programme also increased institutional capacity at other levels—the municipal technical unit, AJAM and others.

Payment for services

Users pay a tariff to cover the operational and maintenance costs for water services. However, tariffs currently cover only 15% of the depreciation costs of assets. There may be some room to increase tariff rates, but, even then, most of the funds for major expenditures will have to come from elsewhere.

Post-construction support and monitoring

The programme supported the establishment of a number of monitoring mechanisms, including day-to-day monitoring by the water committees; checks by AJAM of its members’ performance; follow-up support by the municipal Water and Sanitation Technician; and monitoring by the SANAA Operation and Maintenance Technician. Despite these, some limitations were observed (see Areas for Improvement).

LESSONS LEARNED

Full coverage creates a ‘critical mass’ of water and sanitation services, as well as improvements in hygiene behaviour, reducing the risk that services deteriorate and achievements are reversed. The ‘everyone’ and ‘forever’ aspects of the Water For People programme are mutually reinforcing.



Eulalio Hernández, plumber of the community of El Tule, explains the steps in cleaning a tank.

COSTS

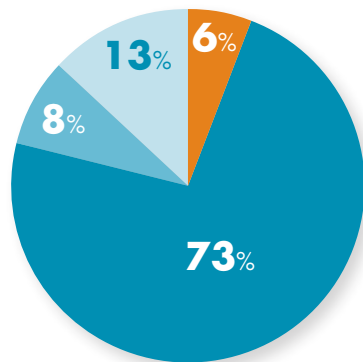
Economies of scale and alliances with the municipality and other agencies were major factors in enabling full coverage. The cost of the intervention package—including the costs of all water and sanitation works, capacity building, technical assistance and the professional time costs of Water For People and municipal staff—totalled around US\$582,000 or approximately US\$106/person—well below the investment ceiling of US\$250/person used in the sector. The ‘everyone’ approach reduces transaction costs by concentrating efforts in one area, and thus keeps costs low.

Water For People covered 73% of the total costs (see Figure 1). But as contributions by the municipality and the communities went up, the percentage of the annual costs covered by the NGO went down, so that by 2011, Water For People was covering only 48%.

Service providers need continued support. Current expenditure on monitoring and support is calculated at approximately US\$0.90/inhabitant/year (see WASHCost Working Paper 5¹ for further details). This is somewhat lower than equivalent figures from elsewhere in the region: a more detailed study would determine whether this is adequate.

¹ <http://www.washcost.info/page/1567>

■ ■ ■ **FIGURE 1: TOTAL EXPENDITURE 2007 - 2011**



TOTAL \$582,148

- Water For People-Honduras: Salaries, capacity-building, non-local materials, travel expenses, designs
- Municipality of Chinda: Local materials, qualified labour
- Communities: Local materials, non-qualified labour
- SANAA (the National Autonomous Water and Sewerage Service)-USAID: Non-local materials



The commitment of the municipality is to dedicate a staff member, paid for by the municipality, and to have a technical unit, backed up by a municipal by-law.”

Constantino Herrera, Mayor of Chinda

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

It is not clear who is responsible for funding and carrying out replacements, major rehabilitation and extensions, which may limit the sustainability of the progress made in Chinda. There is an implicit understanding that this is a shared responsibility between the user community, the municipalities and, eventually, third parties such as national government, but the mechanisms for dividing up that responsibility are inadequate.

As part of the process to ensure the long-term funding for capital maintenance expenditure, the municipality needs to develop a municipal water and sanitation plan and policy. The water committees are probably not capable of developing fully-fledged asset management plans themselves and, without the support of a municipal plan, are unlikely to be able to plan for capital maintenance in the long term.

Follow-up support and monitoring need to be more systematically organised. Monitoring by the water committees and AJAM is currently basic and unstructured, because of a lack of instruments and check-lists. The municipalities and SANAA only provide support at the request of the water committees when there is a problem. Routine visits to all communities would allow

problems to be detected and dealt with at an early stage. Although this is part of the municipal technician’s role, in practice it does not occur.

REPLICATION

The ‘Everyone, Forever’ approach has potential for many other water and sanitation NGOs and development organisations. In Honduras, such organisations already work in a limited number of areas and could further concentrate their efforts and achieve full coverage in the municipalities where they work. This model is probably applicable in other countries as well. Nonetheless, a number of factors warrant consideration:

- **Unit size.** The approach may have worked in Chinda because the municipality is relatively small, making it easier to generate synergies and local critical mass. Whether this works at larger scales remains to be seen.
- **Institutional framework.** All organisations working in the local water sector need clearly defined responsibilities. Water committees need a clear mandate and legal authority to provide services; responsibility for providing on-going support, monitoring and follow-up also needs to be clearly allocated. There is little point in developing institutional capacity if it is unclear who should do what. ■

ABOUT THE CASE STUDY

This case study was written by Stef Smits (IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre), with inputs from the Water For People Honduras team. See www.waterservicesthatlast.org/everyone-forever for the full study report (in Spanish) and a complementary video. This study was co-financed by Water For People and Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale), an IRC initiative to promote water services that last funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.