

Application Form submitted by the initiative to participate in the Transformative Cities People's Choice Award

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Location:	San Pedro Magisterio neighbourhood, Cochabamba, Bolivia
Title of the Transformative Initiative:	“Water and Sanitation for All”
Name of organization:	Fundación Abril/Plataforma de Acuerdos Públicos Comunitarios (PAPC, or Platform for public community partnerships)
Type of organization:	Non-profit civil society organisation. International network
Website:	http://www.fundacionabril.org/ http://www.plataformaapc.org/
Category and Edition:	WATER. Transformative Cities Award 1st edition (2018).
STORYTELLING	
Summary	
<p>The “Water and Sanitation for All” project aimed to guarantee the right to sanitation in the San Pedro Magisterio neighbourhood by building a wastewater treatment plant and strengthening community management of the integrated water service through the <i>Cooperativa de Agua San Pedro Magisterio</i> (San Pedro Magisterio water cooperative).</p>	
Context and problem definition	
<p>In Bolivia, despite the significant advances made in recent years to guarantee the right to access to drinking water, the right to sanitation is still being denied. It is estimated that only 48% of the population has access to sanitation in the broader sense of the term (GRAS, 2011). The situation is even more alarming when we go beyond the statistics – that is, when we look at wastewater treatment, and not only connections to sewers or the existence of</p>	

septic tanks in homes: 80% of wastewater does not receive any kind of treatment before returning to the environment. In the city of Cochabamba, most of the wastewater is discharged into the Rocha River. Pollution in the river reached such high levels that it was declared an “environmental disaster” in Environmental Audit K2/AP06/M11 carried out by the State Comptroller in April 2012.

The objective of the “Water and Sanitation for All” project was to guarantee the right to sanitation in the San Pedro Magisterio neighbourhood by having a wastewater treatment plant built and by strengthening community management of the entire water cycle (from its intake to its return to the environment) through the neighbourhood’s water cooperative, *Cooperativa de Agua San Pedro Magisterio*.

Design and Initiation

Fundación Abril, CeVI (Centro de Voluntariado Internacional) and PAPC (Plataforma de Acuerdos Públicos Comunitarios, or the Platform for public community partnerships) initiated a dialogue with the water cooperatives in Cochabamba, some of which began to be concerned with treating wastewater. This was the spark that set off the process that would collectively forge the “Water and Sanitation for All” project.

Formulated in March 2012, the project aimed to help guarantee the right to access to basic sanitation by strengthening the community and cooperative’s management of water services. The initiative received funding from the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region of Italy and the water authority (CATO Friuli Centrale) and began work in early 2013. After a long and coordinated discussion with the water cooperatives, the analysis of technical and technological options and consultations with local and departmental authorities, in early 2014, the project to build a community wastewater treatment plant in the San Pedro Magisterio cooperative (located in District 2 of the municipality of Sacaba) began to be implemented.

After nearly two years of intense work, the first community run domestic wastewater treatment plant was inaugurated on the Rocha River in April 2015.

Implementation

The project was born from a demand and a request from a community: the San Pedro Magisterio cooperative felt the need to treat domestic wastewater in its area to avoid polluting the Rocha River and the environment.

This was the starting point of the initiative and the reason why the relation with the community and its leading role in interventions are central to the project. The community thus became a partner of the project, instead a group of beneficiaries who passively receive help from outside.

The technological aspects of wastewater treatment were discussed locally with engineers and experts from Cochabamba. In the discussions, local experiences and knowledge was valorised instead of solutions “from the outside” that may work in certain contexts, but when applied to the local environment, can generate technical dependency and work inefficiently. In fact, one of the biggest risk factors for sanitation projects is related to their technical and economic sustainability – that is, ensuring the necessary conditions so that beneficiaries can keep the sanitation system operating over time, regardless of whether it is simple or complex. To avoid this risk, efforts were made to involve the community in all phases of the intervention in order to reaffirm, with every step, their commitment to and their appropriation of the project. Assemblies with all members of the water cooperative were held to share the technical design of the water treatment plant, discuss improvements to the domestic use of the sewerage system and the introduction of a new tariff structure that guarantees the system’s economic sustainability, and encourage all neighbours to take ownership of the initiative.

Furthermore, an agreement was signed with the San Pedro Magisterio cooperative, which committed to assuming all of the tasks necessary to operate the treatment plant once it was built, thereby guaranteeing that the necessary operational and maintenance activities would be executed.

Finally, environmental awareness activities were held in the neighbourhood school.

Results achieved and Evaluation

- Construction of a wastewater treatment plant made up of the following units:
 - Grated chamber
 - Grit chamber
 - Measurement of flows using a Parshall Flume
 - Distribution chamber
 - Anaerobic reactor with upward flow
 - Sludge drying bed
 - Gas removal system
 - Artificial wetland
- Treatment of the wastewater from 300 families and improvements to the hygiene and sanitary conditions in the San Pedro neighbourhood
- Strengthening the San Pedro Magisterio water cooperative's capacity to offer integrated water services to the 300 families affiliated to the cooperative, with autonomy, participation and efficiency

Elaboration and approval by the San Pedro cooperative members in a general assembly of a new tariff structure that guarantees the sustainability and continuity of integrated water services over time.

Political Strategies

While access to water is a “very fundamental right” enshrined in the Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the municipalities – that is the Bolivian state – have established a policy of coopting and incorporating many community systems into its inefficient and corrupt structure. They have done so according to a short-sighted and sinecure logic that focuses only on the “service”; it does not treat community water management as a space for community life and an instrument for linking life to Pachamama.

The San Pedro Magisterio cooperative had to go through this experience. The municipal authority in its sector (through the municipal water operator) attempted to sabotage the project. It criticised the technical design of the plant, did not issue the environmental permits required to execute the project and tried to create political divisions in the community.

Thanks to the community's unity and determination, it succeeded in overcoming all of these obstacles, paperwork and sabotage. The men and women of this community challenged the state-municipal authorities by defending their right to manage water as a community, establishing alliances (with other neighbourhoods and public servants) to resist political pressure and strengthening their participatory and transparent internal decision-making mechanisms. Finally, the initiative demonstrated that an organised and united community can manage water resources more efficiently and in a more sustainable and integrated way than the large operators (public or private).

Related legislations

The new Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia approved on 25 January 2009 establishes that the state is responsible for providing basic water and sanitation services (Art. 20, II). Public, cooperative, community or mixed entities can offer these services. It also stipulates that "access to water and sewage are human rights, are not the object of concessions or privatization, and are subject to the licensing and registration regime, in accordance with the law" (Art. 20, III).

The Framework Law on Autonomy and Decentralisation (2010) also authorises community operators, such as the water cooperatives, to provide water and sanitation services. This law establishes that it is the responsibility of autonomous municipal governments "to provide drinking water and sewage services through non-profit public, cooperative (...) entities in accordance with the Political Constitution of the State and in the framework of policies established at the central state level" (Art. 83, I).

The water cooperatives are characterised by the institutional organisational form officially established and protected by the recently passed General Cooperatives Law (Law No. 356 of 2013) and its regulation (2014), which replaced the General Cooperative Societies Law of Bolivia of 1958. The new law recognises three different categories of cooperatives: productive, services and public services (Art. 23). The water cooperatives belong to the last category (Chapter VI).

Lessons learned

1. Communities are not the object of a development or social change initiative, but rather the main subjects. As such, they must have the power and authority to define priorities and make decisions.
2. Decentralised initiatives can guarantee greater efficiency and sustainability than large centralised projects by ensuring that beneficiaries participate in and take ownership of the project and services.
3. To guarantee sustainability over time, it is necessary to involve all actors in the community. Change must be the result of an assembly-based process that builds consensus through concrete actions.

EXTRA INFO

Supporting documents

<http://www.fundacionabril.org/areas-de-trabajo/escuela-andina/agua-y-saneamiento-para-todas-y-todos/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLSfie9ijdA>