

Building an Enabling Environment for Universal Access to Safe Water in Colombia





What's the problem we are aiming to solve? Well, the picture speaks for itself.

- Even though significant progress has been made in Colombia over the last decades, there is still a significant gap when we talk about the **quality of water** people are actually drinking. That picture was taken at a children's "comedor" (school diner) in the periurban area of Ibague.
- Lack of quality at the point of consumption may be traced to various causes: lack of a reliable system, absolute lack of any treatment whatsoever, or lack of appropriate treatment, service cutoffs, re-contamination during transportation, etc.
- This problem particularly affects the most vulnerable. They normally live in periurban settings and disperse rural communities: children, indigenous groups, populations who are displaced due to violence.

To ensure water quality in the long term, the solution CAWST proposes is to provide the institutions responsible of serving these populations the knowledge and skills required to select and implement appropriate technologies to treat water at the household level.

- Critically, these appropriate solutions also cover acceptability: they significantly improve the organoleptic characteristics of water, and they use simple materials (such as clay, plants, sand, etc.) that are easily accepted by people and are readily available locally.
- Household options are also way more affordable than centralized systems, and people can pay, select, maintain and operate them in their own homes. This empowers them to have safe water, independently from external entities which are outside of their control.



The main activities we propose are:

1. Train key stakeholders in harder to reach regions. We aim for diversity of participants in the trainings, while targeting those responsible for or likely to take action. For household water treatment, considering and incorporating the criteria and needs of the community is essential for effective implementation; thus, the training covers this in addition to technical subject matter.

In addition, to increase participation and equity, adapt CAWST education materials to the local context and needs, make them freely available to everyone, and explore using digital and mobile tools (online and offline) to make them more accessible to remote communities that are harder to support in person.

3. Lead sector strengthening and knowledge sharing on household water treatment by organizing a National Learning Exchange as well as other knowledge sharing activities within the WASH Clusters created in different parts of the country. These activities allow WASH practitioners to learn from each other to overcome challenges as well as encourage each other to take action.



Acting as a link with main sector stakeholders, including:

NGOs, community based organizations, donors and foundations, government, academia and private sector



2. Provide technical support and guidance to existing and new implementers of household water treatment projects in rural areas: field visits, on-going remote support, support government institutions in the selection, planning and execution of programs and assist municipalities to implement pilots. This ongoing support is essential in ensuring the initial training translates to action. Throughout this process, the critical role of women in the successful implementation of WASH programs is highlighted, particularly as Community WASH Promoters.

Increase the relevance and effectiveness of WASH implementation by supporting the competency development of WASH practitioners. This approach increases sustainability by ensuring WASH practitioners at various levels (from National, Department, Municipal, Community) have the knowledge and skills they need to make better decisions and reach the last mile. For women and disadvantaged people, competency validation is a method to increase their credibility and formalize their role in WASH systems.



Strengthen the technical capacity of our local training partner FRPG so they are able to provide high quality technical training and consulting support to local practitioners. This aspect increases sustainability beyond the timeline of this project by building the capacity of a local institution to act as the local expert organization on household water treatment and provide timely ongoing technical support required by implementers

Scaling Up Enabling environment



Focus on gaps

Norms and policies

Inter-sectorial approach

Knowledge and skills at scale

Commitment and motivation

Local partnerships

Resources

Therefore, to make sure we leave no one behind and accomplish SDG target 6.1, we need to make sure there is the enabling environment that allows the proposed solution to be scaled up.

But, what is really needed to create that enabling environment and scale up?

1. Firstly, the gaps in access and quality need to be identified and a commitment from government to focus in closing them. Our role there is to keep monitoring progress and action, and to actively advocate for them.
2. Secondly, the supportive legislation that has been developed needs to be practical enough to be put in practice where needed.
3. Reaching everyone with safe drinking water in Colombia and elsewhere is an outstanding task that requires a comprehensive view of the problem and working with multiple sectors to approach and solve the issue. In our particular project, we are working with all government departments that are somehow linked to water, and at all levels of government, from national to municipal.
4. Even though legislation, willingness, and resources to address the issue exist, we need to also make sure that the knowledge and skills exist at the right scale, and that they reach decision makers at community and municipal levels.
5. It may sound obvious, but we need people to be open to recognizing gaps and past mistakes, and who are committed and motivated to address this issue. All the preceding points contribute to building that commitment and motivation.
6. We can't do this on our own: we need a local partner that is capable, who knows and better understands the context.
7. And finally, resources need to be applied to this approach, but not focusing solely on the hardware and infrastructure. Building this enabling environment requires human resources, capacity, and simple, context-appropriate, affordable technologies.

Thank you



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