



ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

3 FOCUS ON PEOPLE'S EMPOWERMENT, DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Civil Society Organizations are effective as development actors when they support the empowerment and inclusive participation of people to expand their democratic ownership over policies and development initiatives that affect their lives, with an emphasis on the poor and marginalized.



Photo: Lorraine Swift/CFCA

Citizen solutions for water justice: Change for Children Association

Change for Children Association (CFCA) works in partnership with grassroots organizations in Latin America and Africa to achieve sustainable community development. It works for human dignity, healthy communities, and global justice.

CHALLENGE

In 2004, 48% of Nicaragua's population did not have access to municipally provided and regulated water systems. As a result, the rate of diarrhea caused by water born diseases among children under five rose to 49% (UNDP 2004). The water crisis has been felt the hardest by people living in the northwestern province of Chinandega — the driest, more environmentally fragile region of Nicaragua. The region has been susceptible to tremendous damage as a result of hurricanes (Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and Felix in 2007), severe drought causing 100% loss of crops (2001), and the rising effects of climate change — all of which has reduced the flow of freshwater in the region's lakes and rivers by a drastic amount in recent years. Extensive agriculture and deforestation have led to the degradation of soil quality and overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, both of which have contributed to the contamination of the water table.



RESPONSE



In 2004, CFCA, with support from CIDA, began working in partnership with Centro Humboldt, a Nicaraguan civil society organization, to respond to the growing water crisis in the country through a holistic 'Water Project' — an initiative that has engaged community participation, local decision-making, and advocacy for water as a human right every step of the way. Over the past eight years, CFCA and Centro Humboldt have drilled 40 wells, repaired 35 community water systems, and distributed over 450 eco-stoves and 50 solar stoves. This has provided year-round access to clean water using sustainable technologies coupled with complementary health and hygiene programs for over 75,000 people in 10 municipalities in the region.

Community participation has been crucial to the success of the Water Project. Since 2004, the project has provided over 50 training workshops to help communities form gender-inclusive Community Water Committees (CWC) to strengthen local capacity for long-term water management. Today, the CWCs have grown to include 702 water committee members in the region, and Centro Humboldt facilitates knowledge-sharing between members and groups through a national Coalition of Community Water Committees.

Additionally, the project has facilitated 22 workshops for municipal governments to learn about best practices related to governance for sustainable water management and preserving environmental and public health.

This project also facilitated Centro Humboldt's participation in the public consultations around the drafting of Nicaragua's water law (Law 620) in 2004. In the last several years, they have also facilitated increased public engagement and coalition building around drafting Nicaragua's water committee law (Ley de CAPS), which was passed in May 2010. Both these laws ensure that potable water is a basic human right, and that CWCs are recognized as rightful stewards.

LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

- Formation of gender-inclusive “Community Water Committees” to manage water and environmental resources, and facilitate regional advocacy for water as a human right;
- Creating pathways for women to be involved in decision-making — many for the first time in their lives. One of the unexpected results of this project was the creation of Chinandega’s first all-female baseball league. Women beneficiaries began spending less time walking to gather water and firewood, and through their involvement in the CWCs, also wanted to develop capacity for organized recreation.
- Pairing implementation with advocacy: Centro Humboldt reports that its practical experience as implementer of a community water project has improved its capacity for advocacy at the national level, as it learns direct lessons about local implementation which improves its contribution to national and regional round tables on water management.



MAINSTREAMING/KNOWLEDGE SHARING



CFCA believes that knowledge sharing is critical to strengthening our collective development efforts — globally and locally. We provide mentorship to our Canadian-based project partners — many of which are emerging grassroots organizations — about our approach to engage local capacity building. Our Nicaraguan partners are at the forefront of CSOs in Central America, working to share knowledge regarding local practices for climate change adaptation, and advocating for political and economic reform on a national and regional level.

Due to its success at mobilizing local communities to sustainably manage their water resources, Centro Humboldt was awarded a 2012 United Nations Equator Prize for this project. They attended the Rio+20 environment conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012 to accept the award.

NEXT STEPS

Change for Children and Centro Humboldt are seeking partnerships with foundations and donors that will allow us to continue this project and showcase the success that water provision has had in the lives of people (particularly girls and women) in northwestern Nicaragua. Together with our partners, we want to share our best practices in this area with other NGOs implementing similar projects in Latin America and around the world. Our continuation of this project in 2012-13 involves purchasing a water well drilling machine, which lowers the operational costs of future projects and provides for the sustainability of the initiative for Centro Humboldt as an NGO.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Change for Children
<http://www.changeforchildren.org>

Centro Humboldt, Nicaragua
<http://www.humboldt.org.ni>

Comités de Agua Potable y Saneamiento de Nicaragua
<http://capsnicaragua.blogspot.com>

Go here for more examples of how Canadian civil society is improving its development practice: <http://www.ccic.ca/IP-case-studies.php>