



Panama Project Brief:

Local Resource Based Approach Water and Sanitation Governance Improvement

This project brief describes the joint programme developed by the Ministry of Health (MINSAL, Ministerio de Salud) in co-partnership with the Pan -American Health Organization (PAHO), UNICEF, and ILO, through the Employment Intensive Investment Program.

The Program aimed at strengthening equity in order to reduce gaps in public services and provide safe water and sanitation and empowerment to the most excluded populations of the Ngöbe and Buglé indigenous region through an intercultural approach.

Project Background

Panama has ten indigenous peoples groups: Ngöbe, Buglé, Guna, Yala, Madungandí, Wargandí, Emberá, Wounaan, Bribri, and Naso-Tjërdi. The Ngöbe and Buglé people represent 65 % of the indigenous population of the country. Their human development index is estimated at 0.6413 lower than the national average of 0.765.

Despite the high economic growth rates, poverty prevalence remain high in Panama, reflecting a situation of acute inequality. 16.4% of the population of urban areas and 52.1% of the population living in rural areas are considered poor. The poverty prevalence rate is even an alarming 96.3 % in indigenous regions. The 2010 housing census indicates that, of the 26,256 homes in the region, 61 % had no access to piped water and 59% had no access to any sanitary solution for waste disposal. Thus the prevailing practice was to use rivers and streams both to fetch drinking water and for other domestic uses, as well as dispose of waste.

Before the joint programme, 56% of the households in Kankintu and 75% in Bisira had no access to drinking water, and none of them had sanitation services. This resulted in a high incidence of Diarrhoea (among children), skin disease and intestinal parasites, as well as Malaria.

The Project

The WASEG was implemented in three stages:

- Formation of the national, regional and district coordination units to manage and implement the programme (2009-2010).
- Construction of the W&S infrastructures and consolidation of local capacities, including the

constitution of different community-based organizations and entrepreneurs (2010-2011).

- Strengthening the local water governance organizations by facilitating their legal registration and, providing the organization with administrative instruments to operate and maintain the W&S system, manage the registers of the water users and their contributions.

The project specifically targeted 9 villages and communities concentrating more than 50% of the population of the districts of Kankintú and Kusapín.

The ILO Action in Latin America

The ILO is supporting the elaboration of laws and mechanisms on indigenous peoples' consultation and participation in multiple countries in the region, including Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, Costa Rica, and Honduras. In Nicaragua, Panama, and Paraguay, within the framework of its Employment-Intensive Investment Programme, the ILO supports the implementation of water and sanitation programmes, as well as road maintenance in Paraguay.

These programmes contributed towards employment generation in indigenous communities. Studies have also been conducted on the situation of indigenous women (with a focus on rural areas), in several countries. Furthermore, the ILO has been providing training on indigenous peoples' rights to trade union leaders from countries across the region, and more recently, also on Convention No. 169 for employers' organizations.

Achievements

The joint programme enabled 5,874 people to get access to drinking water. Two communities built a new sanitation system, and three others built a shared system that provides drinking water to all of them. This resulted in the increase of health of the targeted villagers. According to the Department of Epidemiology and monitoring plan of the joint program, significant reductions

in gastrointestinal diseases were registered. For instance, in Kusapín the prevalence of diarrhoea among children under five fell from 17% to 6%, in Kankintú from 56% to 20% and in Bisira from 52% to 27%. Also, the prevalence of skin diseases among children was reduced from 88% to 21% in Bisira, from 46% to 12% in Kankintú and, from 27% to 5% in Kusapín.

Furthermore, and as a result of the newly built infrastructures, access to water was made much easier and as a consequence women's and children's heavy work of fetching water was drastically reduced. This freed some time and energy for other activities.

Administrative Councils for the management of the newly created sanitation systems were created and institutionalized for the 9 benefited communities. The management and accounting capacities of the board members of the councils were reinforced. They were also trained in technical design and functioning of the water systems.

Furthermore, particular attention was given to gender equality. As a result in Kankintú, 2 out of 6 board members are women and in Bisira 3 are women also out of 6 members. The former president of the JAAR of Bisira was a woman.

Both women and men were hired as masons to build the infrastructure projects in the rural aqueduct system and the healthcare system. This allowed breaking the generalized view that women can only be involved in domestic activities. It was also observed that men started to assume more domestic tasks, to

allow their wife to participate in training and exchange visits outside of the villages.

Finally, a network of Indigenous Entrepreneurship Facilitators with national coverage has been formed, which is linked to Indigenous Network of Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador. The programme also trained six leaders in Human Rights and ILO Convention 169; four in the District of Kankintú and two in the district of Kusapín. The programme also created seven micro-enterprises, with the participation of men and women dedicated to the construction of W&S, and has offered consultancies for local studies, training of trainers, including, marketing and food supply.

The Employment-Intensive Investment Program

EIIP supports ILO member States in the design, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programmes aiming to address unemployment and underemployment through public investment, typically in infrastructure development.

EIIP is part of the ILO's Employment Policy Department and has evolved over the past 40 years from a series of labour-intensive infrastructure programmes to a comprehensive and integrated package of interventions which contributes to both the provision of improved and climate resilient infrastructure, and the creation of decent jobs. EIIP influences public investments to become more employment-oriented through knowledge development, capacity building, and technical advisory services at policy, institutional and operational levels.

Key ILO resources

- Employment-Intensive Infrastructure Programmes: Capacity Building for Contracting in the Construction Sector Geneva, International Labour Office, 1999
- Employment-Intensive Investment In Rural Infrastructure for Economic Development, Social and Environmental Protection and Inclusive Growth. Geneva, International Labour Office, 2015
- Local Resource-Based Approaches for Infrastructure Investments – Source Book. Employment-Intensive Investment Programme, Advisory Support Information Services Regional Programme for Africa, 2009
- Decent Work for Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in the Rural Economy, 2017
- Promoting decent work for indigenous and tribal people through employment and investment programs, Employment Policy Briefs 2018

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For more information on Local resource-based approaches and community infrastructure, visit our web site of the Employment Intensive Investment Programme

<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/lang--en/index.htm>

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