

Editorial

When a local project is successful it seems logical to try to do the same thing elsewhere, or at the regional or even global level. In theory, that might seem simple enough. In theory only, however, since in practice doing the same thing on a larger scale or in a completely different place is no easy task.

The venture in question, the SABA water and sanitation project, achieved just this. Launched some twenty years ago in Peru, over time and with considerable perseverance, it has become established throughout the country. It is now a proven model for managing water and sanitation in rural areas and its key components have been completely integrated into national policy. Since 2014, the SDC has supported the 'export' of this model to four municipalities in Colombia, and it does not intend to stop there. It aims to continue promoting the project in Latin America – several countries have already expressed an interest – and, if possible, on other continents.

In this edition of Global Brief, you will find out more about the factors that contributed to SABA's success, its potential for replication, and some of the obstacles that had to be overcome for it to fully achieve its objectives.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition.

Dominique Favre
Deputy Head of Global Cooperation

Water and sanitation: how to replicate a successful model



An SDC project launched some 20 years ago in Peru has become a model for managing water and sanitation in rural areas. It has since been developed for use on a regional scale; influenced national policy on water and sanitation, and aims to become the international blueprint.

It began in 1995 with local projects in the regions of Cajamarca and Cuzco, in the north and south-east of Peru. The objective was to provide access to drinking water and promote healthy living conditions in rural communities. The programme included village management committees responsible for managing infrastructure (JASS), municipalities, the education system and universities. From the beginning, schools were involved in training young people. The programme was part of the movement towards decentralisation pursued by the central government. It operates under the name of SABA and continues to work along the same principles.

From the local to the regional

SABA was developed at the local level for some ten years before being expanded. Technical departments of municipal authorities were created with the task of inspecting and advising communities and coordinating with the education and health sectors.

In the next step, from 2007 to 2009, programmes were initiated to monitor water quality and, in particular, launch rural water and sanitation courses at several regional universities. From there, links were strengthened with the central government with a view to extending what was already

in the process of becoming a model. Between 2009 and 2012, it was launched in eight regions; it is now established in 14.

The process has had its ups and downs, however. For instance, it was necessary to persuade the residents of the municipality of Pambarumbe that the plants and amphibians that floated or swam in their water reservoir were the cause of the recurring bouts of diarrhoea their children were suffering from. The women of Sañayca, who demonstrated against the project to treat their water with chlorine because “it spoils food”, had to be reassured of the project’s beneficial effects. And to those for whom “water is God given and free”, it was necessary to explain that the modest contribution they were asked to make for access to clean water 24 hours a day in their houses was not to pay for this sacred liquid but for its purification as well as for tanks, pipes and above all maintenance – in other words, everything that is required to make a water system sustainable.

Although 37% of the rural population of Peru still do not have access to drinking water and 81% to sanitation, more than two million people are benefiting from SABA and this number is growing. This result demonstrated to the government the importance of investing in rural areas so clearly that in 2013–2014, for the first time, the part of the national budget allocated to drinking water and sanitation in rural areas reached the same level as that for urban areas.

“We are not the only ones active in this field,” said Martin Jaggi, who has headed the SDC office in Peru since 2016, “but SABA has made a major contribution to this progress.” CARE, the operational partner organisation, continues to manage the projects. Switzerland has not paid for any facility since 2012. It is still a member of a strategic committee and will withdraw at the end of 2017. “The programme has become a reference, fully capable of addressing the issue of water and sanitation in rural areas,” said Cesarina Quintana, head of the local SDC programme and mainstay of SABA from the start. This model has now been fully taken over by the country – an undeniable sign of its achievement.

Success loop

The success of the model has prompted the idea of replicating it in other countries, beginning with other Latin American countries. In 2013–2014, it was ‘exported’ to four municipalities in Colombia as a pilot project (see article p. 3). So far, Panama, Equator, Bolivia, Mexico and Brazil have shown an interest. Last February, a Brazilian delegation visited the project in Peru.

It is clearly not simply a question of copying it, however. “Since each country has its own structures, it is important to identify the similarities,” explained Martin Jaggi. SABA is not a ready-made one-size-fits-all solution; each new project must carefully analyse the factors that led to its success.

The key to the model lies in the interaction between two components that create a success loop as the project progresses. Infrastructure development goes hand in hand with local service management and regional leadership, “as well as technical training and strengthening institutions,” Cesarina Quintana points out. In the locations in question, trained personnel monitor the collection of water, dose the chlorine in the reservoirs, and maintain the system of pipes. “In Peru, as elsewhere in Latin America, infrastructure is the responsibility of the state, but the local community is responsible for maintaining it, hence the importance of involving them from the start,” Martin Jaggi went on to explain.

From this local base “it is especially the project’s expansion in Peru itself that is spectacular,” François Münger said. As head of the SDC Global Programme Water until February 2015, he has followed the SABA programme almost from the beginning. “There was not more political will here than elsewhere,” he said “but the perseverance of the communities and communication between the municipalities, regions and the state was decisive.” The proof? The dialogue with the central government continued under six presidents ...

A model for sustainable development

The ‘integrated’ character of the model is one of the conditions of its extension, including to other countries. SABA knew how to factor in political dialogue, vocational education and training, alliances between various services and innovation in terms of its operation. It created diplomas in water and sanitation management, equipped schools with sanitation, and supported decentralised laboratories. The sustainability of the model is however dependent on good local governance, which is the aim of the decentralisation efforts. “Water management is essentially a municipal task,” explains François Münger, “one can judge good local governance by looking at the water and sanitation.”

In his ‘Analysis of the impact of the SABA model on policies for water and sanitation in rural areas’, which was published in 2017, an independent consultant recommends international extension.

“There are two aspects where SABA showed weaknesses,” Martin Jaggi acknowledges. “One is the low compensation for the members of the community water and sanitation management system who maintain the installations. The other is that we have not done a lot of work on dispersed housing.” He thinks that when the model is introduced in other countries, it will be the right time to step up work with global actors such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on water will require an enormous financial outlay in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and for that SABA could serve as a model. ■



Drinking water chlorination system approved by SABA. San Salvador district, Cusco region. Photo: SDC

Using access to water to promote peace in Colombia



The communities see in these projects the potential to work side by side for a shared cause which has so far been out of reach: their right to water and sanitation. The main challenge consisted in adapting the technical requirements of the government authorities to the conditions of a dispersed rural population. Any delay in the realisation of the projects, however, carries the risk of eroding the trust of the people. But prolonging the project has made it possible to complete the planned investments. The first phase of ASIR-SABA began in 2014 and will conclude at the end of 2017. A second phase will follow up on the first. ■

The SABA model was adopted in Colombia in 2014 under the name ASIR-SABA. It uses access to “water and sanitation to promote peace in rural areas” in four municipalities of the departments of Valle del Cauca and de Cauca, in the south-east of the country. In the initial phase, ASIR-SABA served 4,000 people, however, it is expected to reach the entire rural population of the four municipalities (some 74,000 people).

These municipalities have been affected by the armed conflict which began in the 1960s between the FARC rebel group and the government. ASIR-SABA was launched in light of the peace agreement, which was signed at the end of 2016. The programme embraces the criteria of social integration, sustainability and good governance, which served the SABA programme in Peru so successfully. In this form it is to be used as a trial for projects in other countries. But here, in addition to the criteria adopted in Peru, these particular municipalities were chosen because they had been affected by the presence of armed groups. Two of these municipalities are part of a rapid rehabilitation strategy provided for in the peace agreements.

“The provision of basic services is part of a medium- to long-term strategy to integrate former combatants from the guerrilla war,” explained Luz Angela Bernal, deputy head of the SDC office in Colombia. “It enables us to provide an institutional presence in the territories released by the FARC. Switzerland is also taking an active part in efforts to include victims of the conflict

and possible former combatants living in these areas, with the aim of promoting inclusion and facilitating interaction between public institutions and communities located in regions that are difficult to access.”

Three questions for ...

Edgar Orellana Arévalo, water and sanitation senior specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Based in Bolivia since 2010, Mr. Orellana previously worked at the IDB office in Guatemala.



You are familiar with SABA in Peru.

What are the main ingredients that made it grow, from a local programme to a national model?

The model promotes the sustainability of the interventions, at different levels of government (state, regional and local), as well as the articulation among several different ministries (health, housing, education). This is mainly due to the capacity building included in the model, in particular the strengthening of municipal technical assistance units, which supports the water and sanitation boards in sustaining the system.

It seems that such an extension is not frequent in development programmes. Why is it so?

In terms of the extension of the programme over many years, such an extension is not frequent, because usually the programmes of development are linked to loans of multilateral agencies or national investment

projects, which are very dependent on the national politics of each moment. SABA links different players from different levels (local, regional, national), which makes its continuation easier and allows the programme to take a more long-term view. As for the geographical extension, the key element to ensuring expansion was that the municipalities adopted the model.

Do you see a potential of duplication (with adaptation to local context) for the SABA model in Latin America?

Of course. Mainly in countries with realities close to those in Peru, such as Colombia, Bolivia and especially Ecuador. The cultural and geographical conditions of the communities in the Andes areas are similar enough to allow a replication of the model.

On the ground

Every SABA project has its stories to tell, hurdles to clear and successes to take forward. Here are three examples.

A mayor fights for his town

Reynaldo Quispitupa remembers the time when he had to drink water “the colour of chocolate” in his rural town of Siusa in the district of San Salvador in the south-east of Peru. This was commonplace only 15 years or so ago. Siusa had running water but no toilets. To change this situation Reynaldo ran for mayor in San Salvador. After he was elected in 2003 he approached SABA, which had been working in the province for the previous five years.

Today, the town has a water and sanitation system, and every year hosts public health students from North America who come to study the model. The town has since been able to develop profitable activities such as tourism. Reynaldo, who is no longer mayor, stresses the point that central government

funding – one of the key factors of this success – would not have been possible without SABA. Now the remaining challenge is decent compensation for those who have been trained to maintain the facilities. As for the local people, they are so proud to have running water and toilets that they have organised a beautiful bathroom competition!

Difficult to swallow: chlorinated water

“If you ask why this project is important for the ministry – or rather for the whole public sector – it is for reasons of its harmony within the social fabric.” It was in these terms that the Peruvian minister of housing, construction and sanitation, Francisco Dumler, recently spoke about the SABA model. This ‘harmony’, a result of the active involvement of the recipient communities, has made it possible to overcome a great number of obstacles.

Treating water with chlorine, for example, took a lot of learning and a solid relationship of trust with the villagers to convince them of its beneficial effects. They are used

to drawing water directly from wells and are suspicious of any form of chemical processing. According to Hilda Sandoval, Francisco Dumler’s predecessor, this cultural obstacle explains in part why, in rural areas, only one person in ten, or even one hundred, has access to treated water. It is only when the effects are visible in improved family health that people can be convinced.

The SABA diploma opens doors

When Nancy Málaga brought 80 mayors together from the region of Apurímac in 2011 to present the SABA model, for which she was responsible, she cited the Cusco region as an example, where the people “adopted these services which changed their lives”. “Who is willing to take up this challenge?” she asked them. Only one hand went up: that of Aquilino Buitrón, former mayor of a town where the women had demonstrated against chlorinated water. The region had no technical department specialised in water and the regional authority in charge of housing, construction and sanitation considered the question only in terms of urban planning. By patiently engaging with local communities, Nancy Málaga gradually secured the involvement of the local, then the regional authorities, until finally a biologist, Omar Gutiérrez, was appointed and opened a technical department. Having obtained the SABA diploma, he has taken over the regional directorate of housing. For Nancy Málaga, this sums up the necessary dynamics: “Now when he speaks, he speaks as the regional director and no longer for SABA.” ■

Success factors for upscaling in Peru

The main success of the SABA project in Peru was the Peruvian government’s decision to support and finance the nationwide replication of the models developed in local Swiss funded projects. Several elements of the Swiss approach were crucial for this success:

- The models developed and validated at local levels are comprehensive, integrated and highly adaptable to different contexts, which made them attractive to the Peruvian government and suitable for nationwide upscaling.
- The SDC’s long-term commitment gave sufficient time to develop models to maturity. The continuity in cooperation between the SDC and implementers’ teams as well as the SDC’s readiness to provide advice to the government were also very important.

- SABA knew how to rally the main actors in the water and sanitation sector to its cause, which helped draw the attention of the government.
- The project took great care to empower authorities at local, regional and national levels. In the later phases, the project staff was completely integrated in national structures.
- The project combined community capacity building with local and regional state building, national policy shaping, and reporting experiences back to all levels.

Imprint

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