

Best practices of users' participation in public utility and community management water supply and sanitation service provision in small urban centers in developing countries

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As part of the new developing “study-service” section of PROTOS I was asked to make a research and a summary about users' participation in public utility and community management water supply and sanitation service provision in small urban centers. In this article I will introduce the subject for you.

In many developing countries a water sector reform is actually undertaken. A lot of countries choose for a decentralization of their national water utilities in order to improve their performance. Most of them are forced or driven to go towards private sector water supply as a reaction to poor service delivery by public services. But there are also enough good examples of good public or community driven water service delivery, from which we want to highlight some cases and especially on how users' participate in the management and service delivery.

A key element for good governance of these decentralized agencies is a sound balance of the interests of the local government, the management of the public utilities and the customers. In this process it is important to learn lessons from different experiences with various participation mechanisms at the local level. The importance of sound cooperation between water users and water managers is evident for a better accountability of the public utility and for an improved responsibility for the customers, contributing to an improved performance of the water service.

The different forms of customer participation that will be identified and categorized include:

1. Information:

- Public reporting (transparency).

2. Advices:

- Comprehensive communication/consultation mechanisms between the water utility and the customers.
- Customers' advice.

3. Involved taking decision

- Shared responsibility structures (e.g. where the public utility is responsible for the water production and transfer while consumers organizations take care of the local distribution).
- Full participation of customers' delegates to the planning and controlling bodies of the utility.

After an extensive review of the available information, 5 cases in developing countries have been chosen in order to analyze in depth the different forms of user' participation in public and co-operative models of water and sanitation service provision for urban centers where exists more than 10 000 inhabitants.

Case	Description	Country/ Zone
DMAE (Municipal Department of Water and Sanitary Sewage) Porto Alegre	Water and sewerage services in Porto Alegre, Brazil, are operated, through the city Municipal Department of Water and Sanitary Sewage – DMAE, that holds an autonomous but wholly municipally owned status.	Brazil / Urban Porto Alegre

<p>Comment <i>This case is a unique model and an exemption in the world.</i></p>	<p>Has developed a participatory management system which systematically involve members of the community in its decision-making, and which enable true access and transparency.</p>	
<p>Cooperativa de Servicios Públicos (SAGUAPAC) Comment: <i>This is the more successful co-operative model known and studied nowadays in the world.</i></p>	<p>It is the only co-operative utility in the world supplying water to a major city, an uninterrupted 24 hours a day supply of clean water. The organisational structure of SAGUAPAC is based on a classical co-operative arrangement. Decision-making is decentralised to its 96,000 customers through nine water districts, <i>distritos de agua</i>, in which the municipality is divided.</p>	<p>Bolivia / Urban zone Santa Cruz (1,000,000 inhabitants).</p>
<p>Trade-Union Cooperative Comment <i>Case very well studied by Wateraid</i></p>	<p>A different co-operative model has proven successful in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh with over 10 million inhabitants. Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (DWASA) decided to contract out one zone to the DWASA Employees Union, while another zone was given to a private water company, also on a trial basis of one year. The union co-operative's results were so much better that DWASA handed over the private sector's contract to the union. The union co-operative's achievements included a considerable expansion of the number of people with access to running water as well as a sizable reduction in water losses.</p>	<p>Bangladesh / Urban-Dhaka</p>
<p>Challenges or urban community in Lusaka Comment <i>This is a good example of community participation.</i></p>	<p>Lusaka houses 33 peri-urban settlements and these have posed a great challenge as regards service delivery. Lusaka City Council and other development partners have since adopted the community management approach. Development actors utilize a community development structure know as Residents Development Committee (RDC). Local authorities form these committees with assistance from existing local leaders and development agents.</p>	<p>Zambia / Peri Urban areas from Lusaka</p>
<p>Community water board in Itagua Comment This case is a good example for community participation within a co-operative model</p>	<p>This case study describes a successful approach for providing water supply services in Itagua, a town located 25 kilometers east of Paraguay's capital of Asuncion, using a community-based water board model. The model, referred to as the <i>junta model</i>, is based on a board of directors elected by a general assembly of water users. The junta now serves the entire urban population of 25,000 with water supply services and has a full-time staff of 23 employees. The junta is completely separate from the municipality, administratively and legally, although one of the five board members is a municipal representative.</p>	<p>Paraguay / Small towns Urban zone (25000 inhabitants)</p>