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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Sustainability of WASH solutions in rural areas thru social innovations implemented by local actors.

March 23, 2023, 14:00 – 15:30 Hrs EST - Virtual

Organized by: Fundación Avina; Confederación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones Comunitarias de Servicios de Agua y Saneamiento, CLOCSAS (regional); Asociación de Organizaciones comunitarias Prestadoras de Servicios Públicos de Agua y Saneamiento de Colombia - Aquacol; Centro de Apoyo a la Gestión Rural del Agua Potable, CENAGRAP from Cañar and Centro de Atención Integral Agua para la Vida en Guaranda, Ecuador; Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology, CAWST (regional); UNDP Costa Rica; Cántaro Azul and Organismo Municipal de Servicios Comunitarios de Agua y Saneamiento (OMSCAS) from Berriozábal, Chiapas, México.

Background on the event (one paragraph)

Throughout the Americas, leaders in rural and peri-urban areas have voluntarily and without remuneration taken on the task of managing water and sanitation services to improve the quality of life in their communities. This work, carried out through Community-based Water and Sanitation Services Organizations (CWSOs), allows them to provide safe water where national and local governments do not reach. These community processes are examples of social innovation, fostering community participation, capacity building, interaction and learning about technologies. The work has not been easy for all communities, however, some CWSOs have developed advanced management skills. This has been possible through collaborative work strategies, wherein several CWSOs form a regional association to share knowledge and learning opportunities. In doing so, they have demonstrated their capacity to improve the quality and efficiency of services, become sustainable, manage climate risks, make available and disseminate innovations and scientific knowledge, and increase their advocacy capacities. OCSAS play a key role in improving the quality of life of the millions of people they serve, making their sustainability a primary objective for public institutions, multilateral cooperation agencies and the organizations and institutions that support them. Fundación Avina has recognized a powerful answer to the regional challenge of CWSO sustainability, described as “Sustainability Centers” (SC). A SC is an innovative non-profit social enterprise, developed and operated by partner CWSOs in a region, which offers a platform of specialized services to these CWSOs, with the main objective of improving their levels of management and sustainability, to ensure the communities' quality of life, quantity of access to water, inclusive and democratic participation and resilience to climate change. Avina together with partner organizations, has developed and implemented a strategy for the creation and multiplication of SC in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The event will share this strategy and its results to date, as well as some examples of solutions that can be applied in the most difficult cases, where centralized systems do not reach, to ensure the universalization of the human right to water and sanitation and leave no one behind.

Water Action Agenda (one paragraph, if possible, please include the link to your commitment in the [Water Action Agenda database](#))

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- CWSOs are a model of participatory democracy and citizen action that helps the State in its responsibility to ensure these Human Rights.
- Sustainability Centers allow the generation of economies of scale among the associates to reduce costs and expenses of community organizations.
- Sustainability Centers are a scalable solution to improve and maintain CWSOs performance levels.
- CAWST indicates in its theory of change that education can catalyze independent interventions in water, sanitation and hygiene at the necessary scale.

- CENAGRAP is a Public - Community Partnership between the Intercultural Decentralized Autonomous Government of Canton Cañar and the CWSOs, non-profit, to promote organizational, environmental and infrastructure sustainability of community managed water systems of the Cañar County.
- El OMSCAS de Berriozábal es un soporte técnico, de gestión de recursos para obras de infraestructura, de fortalecimiento de capacidades y promotor de acuerdos con instituciones y organizaciones.
- Berriozabal's OMSCAS in Chiapas, Mexico, is a Center that provides technical support and resource management for infrastructure and capacity building, and promotes agreements with institutions and organizations.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- The Sustainability Centers (SC) are a social innovation to solve the sustainability of community water and sanitation systems, which has validated and running models throughout the LAC region.
- SCs have great potential for replication and scalability. They also have the potential to significantly support water quality monitoring processes at the community level.
- Learning to undertake is a process that requires support and takes time: the most recent SC replications are young entrepreneurship that still need consolidation.
- It is important to incorporate the vision of adaptation to Climate change in water management at community level.
- Achieving Official recognition is quite a challenge for SCs in the initial stage, such as the SC in Guaranda, since regulations in general have legal loopholes around this type of association.