

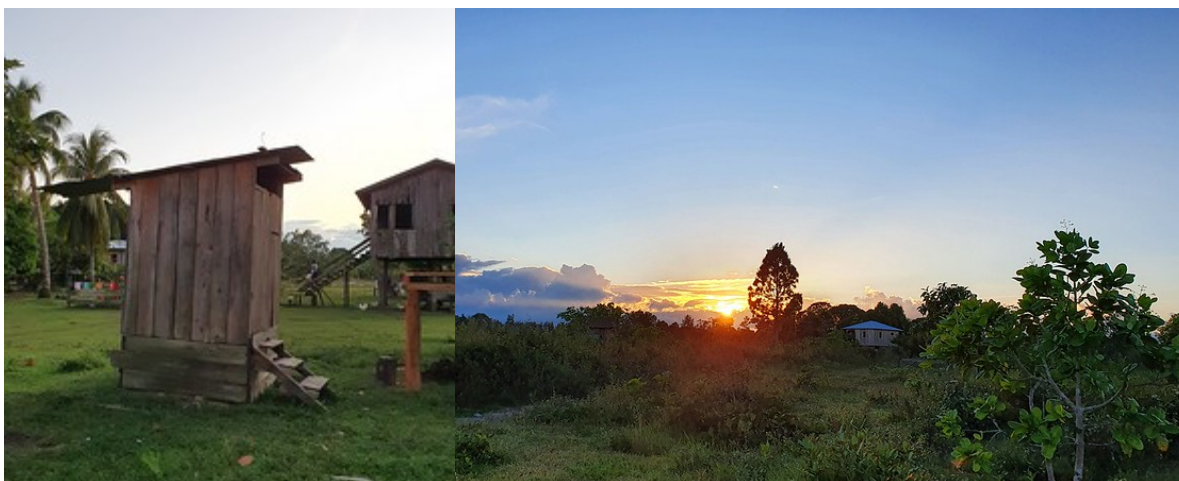


INTERNATIONAL WATERS EXPERIENCE NOTES

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Transforming La Moskitia: Healthy Homes, Improved Lives



Abstract: The GEF CReW+ project in Honduras, aims to address the pressing sanitation challenges faced by indigenous communities, particularly in the Moskitia region. Focusing on installing latrines, the intervention seeks to improve public health outcomes by providing safe and hygienic waste disposal methods. Through enhanced community engagement, cultural sensitivity training, and capacity-building initiatives, the project empowers community members to take ownership of their sanitation needs. While targeting less than 10% of Moskitia families, the project serves as a catalyst for broader sanitation improvements, with support from community leaders. By leveraging local resources and knowledge, the project promotes environmental sustainability and fosters socio-economic development within the communities. Ultimately, it aims to create lasting positive impacts by inspiring collective action and empowering communities to improve their living conditions.

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Transforming La Moskitia: Healthy Homes, Improved Lives

Experience of the GEF - sponsored

An integrated approach to water and wastewater management in the Wider Caribbean Region using innovative solutions and sustainable financing mechanisms (GEF CReW+ Project)

GEF-ID: 9601

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The GEF CReW+ project is a partnership project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) that is being co-implemented by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 18 countries of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). This project builds upon its previous successful phase “The Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management (CReW)” project (2011-2017). GEF CReW+ is being executed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Organisation of the American States (OAS) and the Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention (CAR/CRU) on behalf of the IDB and UNEP respectively. The GEF CReW+ project provides innovative solutions and mitigation strategies for untreated water to improve public health and ecosystem services.

The objective of CReW+ is to support Honduras in its institutional development and management capacities in addressing the challenges of the water and sanitation sector, as well as in the application of financial mechanisms and innovative technologies for the comprehensive management of water and wastewater. This includes the implementation of a pilot innovation project in water management, wastewater treatment, and reuse in Omoa, Cortés Department, with potential replication and/or scaling at the national level, as well as sanitation units in the Moskitia region. This experience note focuses on this last activity.

THE EXPERIENCE

Issue

In Honduras, water and sanitation services, particularly in small towns and rural areas, are facing significant challenges, with limited access to clean water and inadequate systems for collecting, treating, and disposing of wastewater. Many communities rely on individual latrines and septic tanks, often with little to no maintenance, while only a few have access to proper sewage networks. Wastewater treatment is primarily concentrated in larger urban areas, but even there, performance is subpar due to issues like high energy costs and insufficient support for maintenance. Urgent updates and enforcement of regulations are needed to prevent further harm to coastal and marine ecosystems caused by untreated effluents.

The management of water and sanitation services is governed by the Framework Law for the Water and Sanitation Sector (2003), which assigns responsibilities at the national level. Under this law, bodies such as the National Water and Sanitation Council (CONASA) and the Regulatory Entity for Water and Sanitation Services (ERSAPS) were established to oversee policy-making and compliance with regulations. While standards for water quality and effluent discharge were established in 1995, recent efforts have been made to review and modernize these regulations. At the local level, the law has encouraged the creation and strengthening of municipal and community-level service providers.

Efforts are underway to transfer water and sewerage systems from the National Autonomous Service of Aqueducts and Sewers (SANAA) to local management. Currently, there are thousands of Water Boards operating across the country, but many struggle with limited resources and technical support, particularly in rural areas. Despite the existence of legal frameworks, there are still significant gaps in technical

assistance, communication between authorities and operators, and the implementation of water quality standards, especially in smaller communities.

Investment in water and sanitation infrastructure is lagging, leading to deficiencies in design and operation, particularly in wastewater treatment. While there are technological solutions available, both centralized and decentralized, their implementation and management require improvement. It's crucial to address these challenges effectively to ensure access to clean water and proper sanitation for all communities.

Addressing the Issue

This initiative sought support for sanitation endeavors in the tropical region inhabited by the indigenous Miskito population, known for its severe poverty and lacking sanitation services in 95% of its communities. The challenging terrain and scattered population made access difficult. However, the executing agency of the GEF CReW+ Project, GIZ, had been active in the area since 2015, launching the "Sustainable Management of Natural Resources with Climate Aspects in Indigenous Territories of La Moskitia (Pana Pana Project)" to aid in networking, planning, and logistics for efficient execution. The following activities were successfully carried out in the region:

- a) Baseline development: Drawing on the local capacities of the Pana Pana project, a comprehensive baseline assessment of the prevailing sanitation conditions in La Moskitia was conducted. This assessment also guided the formulation of criteria for selecting the most suitable model of latrines for construction.
- b) Workshops for technology selection: Using the baseline findings and established selection criteria for latrines, interactive workshops were organized to engage the community in selecting the optimal latrine model. Considerations included technological reliability and community acceptance. The chosen design was meticulously engineered by sanitation experts.
- c) Local capacity building: Following the selection of families and latrine models, intensive local training workshops were conducted to empower community members to independently construct and maintain their sanitation units, ensuring sustainable usage.
- d) Construction and implementation: Families undertook the construction of sanitation units using locally sourced materials,.
- e) Monitoring: A robust monitoring system was implemented to track the progress of construction activities and ensure the proper adoption of the new latrines. The number of beneficiary families was recorded, and formal latrine handover ceremonies were conducted for each recipient.

RESULTS AND LEARNING

The initiative to construct latrines in the territories of WAMAKKLICINASTA and TRUKTSINASTA was a crucial decision. Within WAMAKKLICINASTA's jurisdiction, nestled in the municipality of Puerto Lempira, Gracias a Dios department, lies a sprawling territory spanning 115,844 hectares, home to 16 Miskito indigenous communities. Initially, the plan was to introduce latrines to three communities – Auka, Kayu Sirpi, and Liwa Kuria. However, recognizing the pressing need, the territorial authorities expanded the scope to encompass three more communities: Yabal Tara, Lisangnya, and Waraban Tara. Together, these six communities were involved in the successful construction of 56 latrines, benefitting 4.78% of families within the WAMAKKLISINASTA territory.

Similarly, the TRUKTSINASTA territory, situated in Puerto Lempira, Gracias a Dios department, spans 56,588 hectares and hosts 30 Miskito indigenous communities. Initially targeting two communities, the project expanded to include four more, resulting in the completion and delivery of 54 full-fledged latrines. This effort extended benefits to 9.2% of families residing in the TRUKTSINASTA territory. By April 2023, a

total of 11 communities – five from WAMAKKLICINASTA and six from TRUKTSINASTA – had embraced the initiative, receiving a cumulative total of 110 latrines.

Despite the modest proportion of families directly impacted, the initiative carries profound implications. It is anticipated that these efforts will instil an appreciation for the significance of sanitation among community leaders. This, in turn, underscores a commitment to fostering a higher standard of living within communities eager to advance their own development. Encouragement abounds for further collaboration in subsequent phases, marking a significant milestone in community development endeavours.

In selecting families for this inaugural sanitation phase, leaders adhered to stringent criteria:

- Preference was given to families exhibiting consistent participation in communal activities, driven solely by their dedication to community advancement.
- Recognition was afforded to families who, through sheer determination, had diligently maintained their own latrines without external support.
- Emphasis was placed on leaders across various spheres – be it community, religious, educational, or healthcare – who serve as exemplars within their respective domains. This criterion, underscored by the consultant, underscores the pivotal role leaders play in setting community standards.

The palpable enthusiasm within local communities is unmistakable. Many families have embraced the benefits of modern latrine usage and commendable construction practices, fuelling their eagerness to contribute to the project and ensure the replication of it by other members and other communities.

REPLICATION

When embarking on the replication of a project aimed at installing latrines within indigenous communities, a comprehensive approach is imperative for ensuring its success and long-term sustainability. Central to this approach is prioritizing enhanced community engagement, which entails fostering thorough communication and active involvement of community members throughout all project stages. This involves convening regular meetings to discuss updates, address concerns, and gather feedback, leveraging various communication channels such as community gatherings and engaging with community leaders to ensure effective dissemination of information.

Recognizing the challenge of accessibility to the communities, particularly during adverse weather conditions, it's important the existence of all-weather roads to guarantee year-round access, especially amidst the rainy season when muddy conditions can impede transportation. However, if access is challenging budgetary considerations should be made to ensure access at critical points during project execution.

Cultural sensitivity emerges as a cornerstone, facilitating respectful interactions with indigenous communities. By providing training sessions for project staff and volunteers on cultural norms, traditions, and values, it fosters trust and positive relationships with community members, thereby ensuring that project implementation aligns harmoniously with local customs and beliefs.

Moreover, flexibility in project timelines is paramount to accommodating the unique social and cultural priorities of indigenous communities. This entails adjusting schedules to align with community events or traditional ceremonies, thereby ensuring maximum participation and engagement and ultimately promoting community ownership of the project.

Empowerment initiatives, particularly those targeting women, are integral to the project's long-term success. By offering training workshops on various aspects of latrine operation, maintenance, and management, it empowers community members, fostering a sense of ownership and guaranteeing sustainability within the community.

Leveraging indigenous knowledge and skills is pivotal in project implementation. By involving community members in the decision-making process and incorporating traditional practices where appropriate, it fosters a sense of pride and ownership, ultimately contributing to the project's success.

Additionally, it's essential to emphasize the importance of using locally sourced materials and raise awareness about the significance of proper latrine usage to prevent contamination and disease spread. Recognizing the financial constraints within indigenous communities, promoting contributions in kind, such as labor and local resources, becomes crucial to ensuring the project's sustainability and long-term success.

Furthermore, forging partnerships with local institutions, such as churches and community organizations, proves invaluable for project implementation. By leveraging their influence and support, it helps build trust, mobilize resources, and facilitate community participation.

Lastly, implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation system is essential to track project progress, measure outcomes, and identify areas for improvement. Regular monitoring visits and community feedback mechanisms ensure project effectiveness, address any challenges that may arise, and promote transparency and accountability throughout the project's lifecycle.

SIGNIFICANCE

Given the challenges faced by Honduras in providing adequate water and sanitation services, particularly in small towns and rural areas, the project becomes even more significant. These communities often lack access to clean water and proper sewage networks, relying instead on individual latrines and septic tanks that may not be properly maintained. As a result, there is a heightened risk of waterborne diseases and environmental contamination. While the intervention targeted less than 10% of the families in Moskitia, its significance lies in its potential to catalyze broader sanitation improvements within the community. By garnering support from community leaders and actively involving community members in the project, it serves as a catalyst for change, inspiring and empowering communities to take ownership of their sanitation needs. It also sets a precedent for collective action and community-driven initiatives. With the momentum generated by this intervention, there is an opportunity for the community to build upon these efforts, expanding sanitation improvements and ultimately enhancing the well-being of all residents in Moskitia.

REFERENCES

www.gefcrew.org

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KEYWORDS

- ◆ Moskitia
- ◆ Sanitation improvement
- ◆ Indigenous Communities

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