

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sustainable Water Fund (FDW) Lessons learnt from FDW post-project reflections

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Sustainable Water Fund (FDW)

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Abbreviation	In full
BNR	Build-Neglect-Rebuild (cycle)
CapEx	Capital Expenditure
EKN	Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
FDW	Fonds Duurzaam Water (Sustainable Water Fund)
FNC	Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GIA	Gestión Inteligente del Agua (Intelligent Water Management)
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IRC	International Resource Centre for Water and Sanitation
IWAD	Integrated Water and Agricultural Development (Ghana)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OpEx	Operating Expenses
PERIAGUA	Institutional Development Programme for Water and Sanitation Utilities in Bolivia
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
RVO	Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland (Netherlands Enterprise Agency)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VEI	Vitens Evides International
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank

Introduction

In 2024, FDW initiated post-project interviews with project leads from completed FDW projects 1 to 2 years after their official ends. The primary aim of these interviews was to gain insights into post-project sustainability, continuation and scaling. These reflections are qualitative insights shared by lead partners, not formal evaluations. As such, they should not be used to draw definitive or scientific conclusions but rather stimulate further discussion and dialogue.

The following key lessons, distilled from 7 interviews conducted so far, provide valuable perspectives on post-project dynamics. RVO will continue these post-project interviews in 2025, consolidating and disseminating lessons learnt. You will find a more detailed summary and interview reflections in subsequent sections.

Key reflections

1. <u>FDW12GH02</u> – Integrated Water Management and knowledge transfer in SK Basin (IWAD Ghana)

The FDW subsidy facilitated IWAD's transition to mechanised farming and the adoption of water efficiency measures. However, sustaining the farm post-subsidy proved challenging in an area lacking market infrastructure and broader governmental support. This highlights the importance of embedding sector or market-based transitions within long-term MoUs (those of the EKNs) and government sector development plans, complemented by phased blended financing strategies.

2. FDW12GH06 – SMARTerWASH (IRC Ghana)

The analysis of big data on non-functional drinking water assets revealed a significant sectorwide issue. This prompted a collaborative effort between the national government and IRC to address the "Build-Neglect-Rebuild" (BNR) cycle through a post-FDW district-wide approach programme. Core funding from the Netherlands government (separate from FDW subsidy) allowed IRC to maintain essential staff beyond project-based financing. This ensured continued engagement with government stakeholders and fostering systemic change through an organised, long-term strategy.

3. <u>FDW12C001</u> – Intelligent Water Management (Federación Nacional de Cafeteros (FNC) de Colombia and Cenicafé, Colombia)

Aligning FDW subsidies with national sector transformation initiatives, such as the coffee sector, in this case, enhances institutional embedding and knowledge transfer, provided that interventions are validated through research. While private sector sustainability priorities may shift (for example, from water efficiency under FDW to regenerative agriculture today), having an independent research and capacity-building organisation (like FNC) ensures continuity. Furthermore, sustainability should not rely solely on fluctuating government or private sector financing; farmer contributions, such as a fixed percentage of sales allocated to research and capacity-building, can create a more resilient financing mechanism.

4. FDW12BD03 – Climate change and water supply in the Mekong Delta (Vietnam) The sustainability of this FDW initiative was strengthened through continued support from the WaterWorX programme post-FDW. This strategic alignment was not planned initially in either the FDW or WaterWorX programme designs. However, it emphasises the value of identifying "carrier programmes" at the proposal or implementation stage to sustain, replicate and scale up innovative approaches initiated under subsidy programmes.

5. <u>FDW12KE03</u> – Financial inclusion for improved health and sanitation (FINISH INK Kenya)

The financial inclusion model for sanitation, initially piloted in India, was incubated in Kenya (via FDW). FINISH Mondial later expanded this to 6 additional African countries. Sustained Dutch funding over 2 decades made this possible. This long-term investment led to systemic change, enabling the establishment of sustainable sanitation markets (that did not exist before

the subsidy) and innovative financing mechanisms such as revolving funds and leveraging micro-financing institutional funding. The FDW subsidy played a critical role in providing the foundation for this transition.

6. FDW14B011 – AQUACRUZ (GIZ Bolivia)

GIZ has been supporting the Bolivian government in WASH sector development for decades, operating under multi-annual plans co-developed with government stakeholders. The FDW subsidy allowed GIZ to significantly scale up the second phase of its utility capacity-building programme, which was subsequently integrated into a third phase post-FDW. Similar to other FDW projects (for example, IRC Ghana and IWM Colombia), embedding initiatives into long-term sector reform programmes and leveraging grant financing to achieve broader objectives enhances project sustainability.

7. FDW14IN20 – Water use efficiency in sugarcane cultivation (Solidaridad India) Ensuring sustainability requires a multi-level approach that integrates national policy shifts, regional engagement and direct farmer involvement. While market forces can drive some aspects of sustainability, scientific research and community-based strategies remain essential for addressing long-term challenges effectively.

Overall key takeaways

Post-project reflections conducted 1–2 years after project completion reveal insights that traditional end-of-project evaluations often overlook, particularly regarding sustainability. Programmes designed to support transitions and scaling could consider the following:

- Include a structured post-project monitoring phase to assess sustainability outcomes beyond the formal project lifecycle.
- **Incorporate a gradual technical assistance phase-out** during the project period to test the adoption and institutionalisation of key practices.
- Identify complementary programmes and financing mechanisms at the proposal stage to ensure continuity and scaling of successful initiatives.

These insights reinforce the need for long-term strategic planning, phased financing and embedded institutional partnerships to achieve sustainable development outcomes.

Additional key learnings

- 1. **Community-centric approach**: Active community engagement and empowerment are central to the success of projects. Tailoring solutions to local contexts (affordable innovations), including cultural preferences (for sanitation projects, for example) and economic capacities, enhance ownership and sustainability. Prioritising gender equality and equity strategies fosters inclusivity and ensures equitable access to project benefits. Project implementing partners that have a long-term engagement with communities can benefit from project results.
- 2. **Partnership collaboration:** Effective partnerships between public, private and NGO sectors leverage resources, expertise and networks to achieve project goals. It is important to engage all project partners in project design, planning and communication, not only the lead applicant. Additionally, it is essential to manage expectations and maintain consistent engagement of partners during the project period. Through the implementation of FDW projects, new partnerships and connections have emerged, even continuing after the project period. However, challenges related to coordination, differing priorities and power dynamics among partners may hinder effective collaboration and decision-making processes.
- Sustainability: Private partners can push the sustainability agenda forward by showcasing the successful implementation of new approaches. Engaging government entities at all levels is crucial for policy support, institutional capacity building and long-term sustainability. Integrating bottom-up and top-down methods contributes to the successful implementation of

a project. Challenges may arise when transitioning responsibilities to government entities.

- 4. **Financial sustainability:** Securing sustainable funding streams is essential for the continuation and scalability of sanitation projects and irrigation projects with smallholder farmers. While innovative financing mechanisms such as microfinance and revolving funds show promise, challenges such as limited access to credit, high transaction costs, and economic instability may impede their effectiveness. Ensuring affordability and accessibility for marginalised communities remains a persistent challenge.
- 5. **Successful project implementation**: Maintaining a focused scope throughout the project implementation maximises project effectiveness and leads to tangible results. At the same time, flexibility and adaptability are usually needed during project implementation. Projects tend to be more successful when embedded in a longer-term strategy of implementing partners.
- 6. **Innovation:** Embracing innovative approaches such as market-based sanitation financing and entrepreneurship drives sustainable behaviour change and infrastructure development. Flexibility, transparency, and continuous learning are essential for adapting to dynamic environments and improving project outcomes. However, scaling up successful innovations and ensuring their replicability pose challenges, as contextual factors and resource constraints vary across regions.

These insights highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of FDW interventions, which require a comprehensive and integrated approach to address institutional, financial, and social barriers. Overcoming these challenges demands sustained commitment, collaboration and innovation to achieve a lasting impact.



FDW12BD03 - Climate change and water supply in the Mekong Delta

15 December 2023

Partner: VEI B.V.

The interview reflects several key lessons and reflections from the climate change and water supply project in the Mekong Delta

Achievements and lasting effects

The project successfully achieved its goals in Vietnam, particularly in Ho Chi Minh, with the establishment of treatment plants and workshops reaching a large audience. In hindsight, it is clear that a feasibility study for the treatment plant should have been conducted initially to ensure its suitability. This highlights the importance of assessing the future resilience of interventions.

Continuity and partnerships

While the project continued in Ho Chi Minh, it faced challenges in sustaining partnerships and activities in other areas post-FDW support. Maintaining partnerships is essential for ongoing success, and transitioning projects to new initiatives like WaterWorX can ensure continuity.

Replication and scalability

Showcase projects, such as the surface water plant, provide examples of scalable and replicable solutions for future endeavours. These projects serve as models for sustainable water management practices.

Success factors and challenges

Factors contributing to success include the 'getting things done' mentality in Vietnam, high utility maturity and political pressure. Challenges include regional autonomy issues, cultural factors and the complexities of privatisation in the water sector.

Evaluation and learning

Evaluating project outcomes and partnerships post-implementation is crucial for learning and improvement. Essential factors for success are flexibility and adaptability during project implementation, along with clear communication and accountability.

The significance of partnerships and adaptability

Building strong partnerships, being adaptable to changing circumstances and recognising opportunities are essential for project success. Understanding the dynamics of leadership changes within partner organisations is critical for project continuity.

Financial considerations and sustainability

Balancing capital expenditures (CapEx) and operating expenses (OpEx) is crucial for project sustainability. Although subsidies can encourage private sector involvement, long-term sustainability depends on effective financial planning and management.

Transparency and reporting

Transparency in project reporting, including post-project evaluations, is essential for accountability and learning. Flexibility in adhering to rigid rules and regulations improves project adaptation and success.

In summary, the interview highlights the importance of thorough planning, strong partnerships, adaptability and continuous evaluation to ensure the success and sustainability of development projects in the water sector.

FDW12GH06 – SMARTerWASH

7 March 2024

Partner: IRC Wash

Project achievements

- The project helped develop innovative approaches for monitoring water services, particularly focusing on counting systems and improving service monitoring infrastructure.
- The project was piloted in 5 districts, identifying issues with system functionality and catalysing funding from various sources to address them.
- Capacity-building efforts successfully improved local authorities' data collecting and water system management skills.
- The project's impact extended beyond its initial scope, influencing subsequent initiatives to strengthen partnerships and adopt a systems approach to water service management.

Lessons learnt

- The project highlighted the importance of sustained monitoring and data collection efforts beyond the project's duration.
- Challenges with technology integration and sustainability highlighted the need for careful planning and consideration of long-term maintenance costs.
- Institutional reforms were necessary to address systemic issues in water service delivery, requiring patience and coordination among stakeholders.
- Government involvement and regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in driving sector-wide transformation and ensuring continued support for initiatives beyond project lifecycles.

Recommendations for future projects

- Shift to a programmatic approach instead of a strictly project-based model to allow for phased implementation and adaptation to evolving contexts.
- Document and monitor the learning process to inform future interventions and ensure continuity beyond project completion.
- Establish mechanisms for sustained engagement and coordination with government agencies and other stakeholders, leveraging partnerships to drive sectoral reform.
- Encourage embassies to maintain interest in and support for initiatives even as countries transition to middle-income status, focusing on institutional development and systemic improvements.

Overall, the interview highlights the significance of long-term commitment, adaptive programming and collaborative efforts to create lasting impacts in the water sector.

FDW12KE03 – Financial inclusion improves health and sanitation

8 December 2023

Partner: FINISH Mondial

Achievements and sustainability

- Venturing into a market where investment in sanitation facilities was not common.
- People's pride in investing in sanitation leads to spillover effects within communities.
- The financial sector is increasingly interested in investing in sanitation projects, with several financial institutions picking up sanitation financing.
- Continued activities in Busia county focus on faecal sludge management, with partnerships with the county Department of Agriculture.
- Challenges in post-project monitoring, especially in Kilifi county.

Changes in project layout

- A desire for greater government involvement and collaboration with local institutions.
- Recognition of the need for more efficient impact assessment methods, considering the dynamic nature of the sectors involved.

Post-FDW support and partnerships

- Essential partners remained involved, with expansion in scope to include more financial institutions.
- The transition from FINISH INK to FINISH Mondial.

Replication and scaling

- Geographical coverage expansion and expansion of partners.
- Replication of the USAID model and partnership with other organisations like Vitens and a toilet manufacturer.
- The development of innovative approaches like the E-ledger app for informal sector lending.

Factors contributing to successes and challenges

- The importance of a committed team and flexibility in project planning.
- Recognition of the crucial role of partnerships and the PPP model in achieving sustainable results.
- Challenges in engaging and transitioning responsibilities to government entities, with an emphasis on the need for flexibility and focus on local governments.

Recommendations and transparency

- Emphasis on transparency and the willingness to share project reports and evaluations.
- Acknowledgment of ongoing challenges in the sector and the importance of continuous improvement.

Overall, the interview highlights the complexity of a sanitation project, the significance of partnerships and adaptability, the need for transparency and continuous evaluation to drive sustainable outcomes.

FDW12CO01 – Intelligent Water Management

4 April 2024

Partners: Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia and Cenicafé

Main takeaways (from the interview) for policymakers and implementing partners

Long-term partnerships

Establish enduring partnerships. particularly with the private sector. This approach will help sustained funding, research and extension services for long-term programming.

Focus on sustainability

Recognise the evolving sustainability priorities of private sector partners. Consistently focus on improving livelihoods (and nature) to create a lasting impact at the farm level.

Regulatory support

Collaborate with governments and businesses to alleviate financial burdens and compliance costs faced by smallholders. This will promote compliance with regulations while safeguarding vulnerable families.

Innovation and adaptation

Embrace innovative technologies and practices such as weather stations and water-saving processing technologies to mitigate environmental changes and enhance resource efficiency.

Gender equality and equity integration

Prioritise gender equality and equity strategies in project design to foster inclusivity and ensure equitable access to project benefits.

Resource mobilisation

Secure long-term financing and align strategies with a clear vision to support transitions like introducing new coffee plant varieties over extended periods.

Strategic focus

Maintain a focused scope and prioritise impactful activities to avoid complexity and maximise project effectiveness, aligning partner agendas to achieve tangible results.

Evidence-based decision-making

Base project designs and recommendations on scientific evidence to enhance credibility and adoption by farmers.

Accountability and communication

Embrace transparent accountability mechanisms, leverage storytelling for post-project dissemination and use social media platforms to sustain project impact and engagement.

The following sections provide a more detailed description of the above lessons from the interview.

Main project successes

- The project was (and remains) a showcase example of how water can be managed differently, enabling farmers to meet regulations while simultaneously improving their livelihoods and the environment. Coffee growers have demonstrated their ability to use water responsibly and return it cleanly to benefit the broader Columbian population. The water that flows through the coffee-growing regions in the mountains reaches downstream areas where most Columbians live.
- Applied water-saving processing technologies reduced water usage from 40 to half a litre per kilogram. This significant reduction helped decrease contamination and lower water consumption across 25 different areas.
- Introduced weather stations provide information services to farmers, enabling them to adapt and mitigate changes in their environment.

Partnership reflections

- For long-term transitions (over 15-20 years), such as the introduction of a new coffee variety, one cannot depend entirely on government funding as they have a 4-year time horizon. There is a need for partnerships that continue to secure their own funds, carry out their own research (to ensure science-based decision-making) and have their own extension services to ensure long-term programming.
- Engaging with the private sector is the best way to ensure long-term project sustainability by using their investments. Once they withdraw, the FNC extension service will provide a follow-up.
- The private sector and companies focus on sustainability changes over time. First is water saving, then regenerative agriculture, and in 5 years, it will likely be something else. While the business sustainability strategy shifts (and their engagement in programming), a focus and vision on improving livelihoods ensures consistent programming at the farm level.
- Over the years, the government and businesses have put many conditions and regulations on coffee growers. The burden and financial costs of complying fall on these smallholders and vulnerable families. By working with the government and the private sector, FDW and similar projects have supported these farmers in complying in multiple regions.

Sustainability of results

- The project introduced rust-resistant coffee varieties, which means that for the next 20 years, no water will be needed to apply fungicides. Rust is a coffee disease.
- FDW required a gender strategy as part of its project design. This was new for the organisation, but as a result of this requirement, it is now a standard practice in all our programming.
- Nespresso has continued to support 15,000 families with technologies developed under FDW.
- The extension services training curriculum has institutionalised the GIA learnings. The extension services staff continue to disseminate the lessons and good practices to farmers. Had there been no post-project extension services, learning would likely not have continued.
- The project partners have continued to secure new financing for projects, and elements of the GIA model are part of these new initiatives. They are embedded in their continuous extension services, provided in the whole country.
- The project further developed the green filter to decontaminate water at the farm level). They continue promoting it across Columbia.
- FDW has built on an already existing and strong institutional and governance setup (export fund, independent research and extension services), ensuring that good practises and lessons are institutionalised and sustained via these.
- The project budgeted for communication strategies, something that projects usually did not do. This made a big difference when announcing the scope of the project, the implementations carried out, the testimonies of the coffee growers and the final results. As a result, the "GIA" brand is still considered a relevant and successful project in the regions where it was implemented.
- The lessons learnt in GIA were a key input for the establishment of the Social Development Direction in FNC, an area that did not exist and continues to collect learnings from the projects. This department continues to support the formulation and implementation of the gender equity policy in the coffee sector.

Policy and programme reflections

- It is essential to acknowledge and understand that it is expensive to create an impact at the farm level, with the aim (of FDW) to return used water clean to the environment, is expensive. The national coffee fund (6 cents of every dollar exported goes to R&D and extension services) is not enough to reach all farmers.
- It is important that FDW (or similar financing) supports long-term processes, strategies and transitions. For GIA, they have a long-term vision. Everything they do needs to align with this.
- Large programmes such as FDW need more focus and awareness of the scope of activities and components. Too often, one attempts to fit is as many activities, components and ambitious outcomes as possible. This often results in overly complex, difficult-to-implement projects, ultimately leading to less impact. Even for large projects, the mantra should be *less is more*.

This also goes for prioritising challenges to be addressed, as one cannot address them all. To avoid trying to serve all agendas, aligning and focusing all partner organisations' agendas is key. This requires defending the project's focus or strategy, long-term vision and focusing on a small number of results or components to get the desired (and observe tangible) impact of those investments. It may take bold negotiations with financiers and the private sector to come to an overall agreement.

 An effective strategy the organisation has taken is to ask for science-based data that defines the financier or private sector wants to implement. This allows the organisation to filter and implement based on science-based decisions. One of the main contributions to success is to have science-based decisions that inform project designs. The current trend is regenerative agriculture. However, there is no standard for this and limited evidence, and lots of experimentation.

In the end, you do not want to give farmers recommendations that will not work. Your recommendations must be based on science-based evidence; otherwise, you will lose the credibility of those you are supporting: the coffee growers.

- There has been a shift towards no-strings philanthropy, whereby investors trust the
 organisation, as they to know best how to deliver results. It does require the implementor to
 be transparent in the investments and the ability to deliver accountability data when requested.
 This reduces the administrative burden many implementors face for accountability reporting
 and frees up staff time to support stakeholders. In general, it is possible with private investors;
 however, with public funds, there will always a need for more accountability as this is
 taxpayers' money.
- While a final report (for accountability) is important, developing a narrative or story that can be told post-project is of vital importance. It is advised to document the lessons for yourself and the organisation, not only for the donor. This story-telling of a project's results will engrain this in the organisation's staff but will also feed into other projects, sustaining previous results.

Therefore, take the time to develop this at the end of a project and programme (ensure it is based on evidence!) and go out and tell that story. A video (with this story) disseminated via social media is a good practice.

FDW12GH02 – Integrated water management and knowledge transfer

in SK Basin 05-04-2024 Partner: IWAD Ghana Lt.

Key lessons learnt

Adoption challenges: Smallholder farmers often prefer less efficient irrigation methods, such as flood irrigation, over more advanced systems. Understanding local preferences and barriers to adoption is crucial for promoting sustainable water management practices.

Knowledge transfer: Collaboration with local and international knowledge institutions is essential for driving agricultural innovation and improving crop varieties suited to local conditions. However, sustaining collaboration and ensuring effective knowledge transfer remain ongoing challenges.

Financial sustainability: Post-project financing is necessary to ensure the long-term success of irrigation initiatives. Rising input prices and economic challenges can pose obstacles to profitability, highlighting the importance of continuous support beyond the project phase.

Main challenges

Economic viability: Economic challenges, including rising input prices and economic instability, pose significant obstacles to profitability in agricultural ventures. Balancing commercial interests with the needs of smallholder farmers is a persistent challenge.

Knowledge transfer: While collaboration with knowledge institutions is crucial for driving agricultural innovation, sustaining collaboration and ensuring effective knowledge transfer remains challenging. Bridging the gap between research and implementation is essential for achieving tangible results on the ground.

Water management: Encouraging efficient water management practices, such as drip irrigation, faces resistance from smallholder farmers who prefer simpler, less efficient methods. Overcoming these barriers to adoption and promoting sustainable water use is critical for long-term agricultural sustainability.

The need for Public-Private Partnerships

Resource mobilisation: Public-private partnerships can mobilise resources and expertise from both sectors to address complex agricultural challenges. By leveraging private sector investments and innovation, governments can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of agricultural initiatives.

Knowledge sharing: Collaboration between public and private entities facilitates knowledge sharing and technology transfer, driving innovation and improving agricultural practices. By combining the strengths of both sectors, stakeholders can develop holistic solutions to agricultural challenges.

Sustainability: Public-private partnerships offer opportunities to ensure the financial sustainability of agricultural projects. By sharing risks and responsibilities, governments and private enterprises can work together to create economically viable and environmentally sustainable agricultural systems.

In summary, addressing challenges related to economic viability, knowledge transfer and water management requires collaborative efforts between public and private stakeholders. By leveraging the strengths of both sectors and fostering partnerships, stakeholders can overcome obstacles and achieve sustainable agricultural development.

<u>FDW14BO11</u> – AQUACRUZ

4 November 2024 Partner: GIZ

Project achievements and lasting effects

- The project, known as PERIAGUA rather than AQUACRUZ, became well-recognised in the sector.
- It established PERIAGUA as a reference for the institutional development of water utilities.
- Utilities acknowledged the benefits and expressed their interest in continued technical assistance.
- Developed manuals and guidelines were reprinted and used by other organisations, for example, AFD, WB, IADB and Bolivian government programmes.
- Staff trained under the project remain in the sector, applying the acquired knowledge.
- The purchased equipment continues to be used in utilities.
- National programmes continue using project-developed technical guidelines.
- The follow-up phase (PERIAGUA III) shifted its focus to municipalities while still offering technical assistance to selected utilities.
- Utilities remain connected and continue to exchange knowledge, seek financing and collaborate on sector-wide improvements.

Challenges in the transition to municipal development

- Utilities still require technical support, but the focus shifted to municipalities.
- Some indicators worsened due to the change in responsibility.
- Municipalities lack sufficient funds for O&M and infrastructure, requiring capacity strengthening.
- The local government must cover 20% of water infrastructure costs, emphasising the need for financial support.

Lessons learnt and replication

- The approach of integrating bottom-up and top-down methods was a key success factor.
- Lessons learnt about groundwater protection and urban WASH have been scaled globally by GIZ.
- GIZ sees value in structured phase-out strategies to sustain project impacts.
- Utility challenges are often treated as local rather than regional issues, which may hinder broader solutions.
- Strategic, long-term partnerships (for example, G2G collaborations) are crucial for institutional reform.

The added value of FDW support

- FDW funding allowed the project to expand from 3 planned utilities to 21, broadening its impact.
- Enabled engagement with different types of utilities, adapting support based on their size and capacity.
- Facilitated structured capacity-building initiatives, including competency certification and continuous training.
- An exchange network between utilities, fostering peer learning and technical support.
- Ensured long-term project visibility, allowing other donors like WB and IADB to adopt methods and outputs.

Potential improvements for future projects

- A structured and sustained development approach for capacity building (TVET integration, recurring training programmes).
- Post-project mentoring support on demand to address evolving sector challenges.
- Consideration of a formal phase-out period to maintain momentum and secure additional funding.
- Strengthening G2G collaboration, recognising that institutional reform requires long-term engagement.

Collaboration and knowledge exchange

- While GIZ and VEI collaborated on technical expertise, higher-level exchanges between organisations were limited.
- Interest exists in linking stakeholders at a strategic level to enhance knowledge-sharing.
- The structured approach used by GIZ (government, departmental and local levels) proved effective and could be adapted in future projects.
- The German government's sectoral approach to WASH financing could offer Dutch-supported programmes insights.

In conclusion

The FDW-supported PERIAGUA/AQUACRUZ project successfully strengthened Bolivia's water sector through institutional development, technical assistance and capacity building. While its legacy continues, challenges such as financing gaps and ongoing technical support remain. Future projects should consider structured phase-out strategies, municipal engagement and sustained mentoring to maximise a long-term impact.

FDW14IN20 – Water use efficiency in sugarcane growing

12-11-2024 Partner: Solidaridad

Key learnings

Project design and partnership management

- The importance of conducting due diligence not only on financial aspects but also on the longterm viability and stability of partners, especially when subsidies are involved.
- Partner ownership and commitment can change, affecting project energy and outcomes. It is essential to manage expectations and maintain consistent engagement.

Challenges and adaptations

- Sustainability challenges are linked to the nature of the companies involved in this project. More traditional, structured companies may progress slower but are better suited to long-term community engagement, as they are rooted in society.
- The aggregation of smallholder farmers is more costly and complex in India compared to large estates in other regions, highlighting the need for a tailored approach.

Post-project engagement

- Continuing engagement after the project's completion has led to the successful certification of the partner NSL, which did not work out during the FDW project period.
- The continuation of activities by Solidaridad and project partners after the project's end helps drive results, such as the demonstration of best practices.

Lessons for future projects

- Stronger initial collaboration and a (video) pitch by all project partners, not only by the lead applicant, could lead to more commitment and understanding of the programme from the beginning. Involving CEOs in project pitches may enhance collaboration.
- More continuous monitoring throughout the project, not just at the baseline and endline, would provide deeper insights and ensure stronger accountability.
- Considering the long-term sustainability of new partners is crucial, especially in this agricultural business with smallholder farmers involved.

Sectoral transformation and water efficiency

- Minor adaptations, affordable for smallholder farmers, can actually be beneficial in terms of water reduction in agriculture and are more easily introduced.
- The programme's success can influence future policies and help shape industry standards on water use and agroecological practices.

Certifications and market influence

- Certification is only one tool; it helps bring practices under a framework but does not fully solve issues like water scarcity.
- There is a strong belief that market-based approaches, such as showing good practices and success stories, and private sector involvement can drive sustainable changes more effectively than direct policy engagement.

Future directions

- The ongoing development of a water tool aims to evaluate green and blue water usage in agriculture, emphasising low-cost practices like mulching to conserve water.
- There is a push towards developing a new standard for water efficiency practices, especially in commodity sectors like sugarcane and leather, which have significant water flows.

The importance of multi-level engagement

Effective sustainability work requires a multi-level approach at the national, regional and farmer levels. Policy shifts and local engagement are crucial. While market forces can help push the agenda forward, scientific and community-based approaches are also needed to address long-term challenges.



Colophon

This is a publication of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO)

Prinses Beatrixlaan 2 | 2595 AL The Hague PO Box 93144 | 2509 AC The Hague

T + 31 (0) 88 042 42 42 Email: <u>fdwcoms@rvo.nl</u> Website : <u>https://english.rvo.nl/subsidies-financing/fdw</u>

Publication number: RVO-111-2025/RP-INT © Netherlands Enterprise Agency | June 2025

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