SWISSAID: Eau potable et assainissement pour les familles de Matagalpa

2nd opinion of AGUASAN (max. 1 page):

Recommendation (assessment conclusions)

We recommend this project for funding. However, we strongly recommend SWISSAID to take the suggestions below into consideration for the implementation of the project. A similar project by SWISSAID has been supported before in a different region in Nicaragua (implementation phase 2016-2017), and the learnings from that project are not documented in the current project description. As a general recommendation to SWISSAID and its local partner we suggest to intensify dialogue with local government entities (Municipalities, regional entities) and to strengthen their active participation in this project.

1. Relevance (or pertinence) of the project

The 4-year project aims at improved access to drinking water, to some sanitation facilities and at training in hygiene for marginalised farmers in one region of Nicaragua. Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in the LAC region, and the project area is remote, with a high poverty index. Most beneficiaries seem to have already access to water, however, the currently existing systems seem to be in poor shape and thus will be either re-constructed, improved or extended. 209 toilets with septic tanks will be built (selection process and criteria have not been described). It is intended to establish water and sanitation committees (CAPs) that maintain the services and manage the administration of the water supply networks.

2. SMART-ness of the objectives

The objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, and time-bound with the exceptions mentioned above and below. Regarding the “reasonable” criteria we do not have sufficient information to judge. Water quality and source protection (through re-forestation) have been taken into account (in comparison to the last project). It remains unclear how the active role of communities will be supported and measured.

3. Approaches proposed

The proposed approach has strengths and weaknesses regarding the following aspects:

Technical aspects: 8 established gravity water systems will be repaired/ replaced and 2 new water systems of the same type shall be established in the mountainous region. To ensure the water quality the water will be chlorinated. These technologies are proven and tested, also in the local context. The approach of the workshops on WASH trainings is not further specified.

Institutional aspects: To better maintain the established and repaired systems, water committees shall be established (unclear if they exist in some communities). As the maintenance of water systems seem to be a problem in many regions in Nicaragua (as already two projects of this kind have been proposed), the major question is how this can be approached in a systemic and systematic way. It needs to be strongly taken into account how the role of the CAPS and the local community can be strengthened. We suggest a more in-depth analysis of the problem to be undertaken (Why did the existing water networks collapse/fail? What will be different this time?)

Social aspects: The gender roles should be extended, to reflect the role of women and men. There is a risk that gender participation is a token, simply by measuring % of women on the committees.

It is not clear if all households in the area will get access to water and if areas that are more difficult to reach are included into the approach (there is no justification on why 209 toilets are built, and for whom, and no description of the local communities). The different social groups within the target area are not further defined, thus it also remains unclear if and how socially marginalised groups are addressed within the approach.

Ecological aspects: Reforestation to protect the water sources and intake areas are planned. The budget of 2000 CHF for 20 hectares seems to be low, given the importance of this aspect for long-term water resource management.

Economic aspects: As the community sets itself the tariff, a minimum tariff should be considered to ensure income cover at least basic costs. It is questionable if the maintenance, repair and construction of new systems can be covered by the revenue through the water tax system. As it is mainly a rehabilitation of water systems and the baseline is not at 0, the allocated budget seems quite high. A considerable amount of resources is spent on salaries, but not sufficient details have been provided to judge if this is within common limits. The costs of the toilets to be constructed is relatively high (340 CHF per toilet), a direct consequence of the technology choice (toilet with septic tank).

4. Expected results of the project and their expected sustainability

The analysis of the problems and of their causes in the region is not described in sufficiently detail and thus it remains unclear why the already established water systems do not work anymore. Without addressing the root causes of previous failures it is not clear if the systems will work in the future.

Overall, we suggest the local actors to re-consider their role in the context of Nicaragua, where it is the role of the municipalities to provide safe drinking water to everyone. Rather than executing the project, the local counterpart of SWISSAID should define its role as a support agency to the municipality, strengthening capacities at that level, and helping to improve governance of the water and sanitation sector at local level.

5. Risks and their mitigation
The risks mentioned in the project documents are relevant, however, the risk analysis is rather narrow without taking the whole system into account (including political and economic risks, which are increasing in Nicaragua). Land ownership conflicts are mentioned as risks but the mitigation strategy mentioned seems rather limited. The lack of support by the local actors is mentioned as a major risk. A stronger approach should be chosen to counteract this risk.
6. Relation between inputs and outputs
Overall, the costs of 80CHF/beneficiary (88 CHF/beneficiary, including overhead costs) are within local bandwidths for new systems – thus, re-habilitating old systems seems not to save costs. The 209 sanitary facilities are quite expensive per beneficiary. The amount for local salaries seems high, but without more details this cannot be judged. 50'000 CHF for project management is a high amount but because of the high overall budget (550'000) within the limits recommended by Solidarit'Eau Suisse.
7. Remarks
The comments of the 2nd opinion for the former project (also implemented by SWISSAID in Nicaragua) should be taken into account for this and future projects.
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