

## Water for Life (WFL) Assessment – Summary and El Porvenir Response

*Water for Life Assessment* (WFL) is a global initiative that derived from the Accountability Forum held in December 2011 in Lempira, Honduras, where independent evaluators and organizations who support water and sanitation projects met to conduct an organizational assessment for a local NGO based on 22 criteria, grouped into 8 categories.

*El Porvenir* (EP) is an NGO founded in 1989 and officially established in Nicaragua. Since 1990 EP has partnered with more than 550 Nicaraguan communities to build more than 1,000 water and sanitation projects. Because EP is committed to excellence, EP requested the WFL evaluation and became the second organization to be evaluated by WFL.

WFL evaluators visited a community that was selected by EP as exemplary of their work and then visited six communities chosen at random from more than 500 communities with projects built before 2009. In each of the 7 communities, the evaluators conducted interviews with Water Boards (called CAPS in Nicaragua), held focus groups with residents, carried out inspections of the water service infrastructure (e.g., water catchment, hand-dug wells, storage tank, latrines, etc.) and visits to households to observe household infrastructure and level of sanitary education.

EP scored 44 points out of a possible 66 points. EP approached this evaluation as a learning experience and was pleased to have the great majority of blue and green results. In some cases, EP found the expectations to be too high. For example, hand-dug wells have been the national norm in Nicaragua, a country with low rural electrification and dispersed homes. Electric water systems are cost prohibitive in sparsely populated areas, so some rural residents would not receive water services. Water for Life noted that all the projects in all the communities visited were still functioning up to 20 years later, a good sign of sustainability.

EP meets the highest expectations in many categories, fulfills the basic criteria in most, and has a few challenges. Overall, EP received a green score (meets expectations), and WFL recommends EP to donor organizations.

The results for EP were as follows:

### Legend:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Red</b>    | Extreme problems encountered  |
| <b>Yellow</b> | Organization does not meet all of the basic expectations listed for the metric – “caution”  |
| <b>Green</b>  | Organization meets all the basic expectations listed for the metric, but does not meet all the high/exceptional expectation criteria – “going well” |
| <b>Blue</b>   | Organization meets or exceeds all criteria for high/exceptional expectations in the metric – “above and beyond”                                     |

| Key Domain                         | Variable   | Score  |
|------------------------------------|--|--------|
| <b>A. Organizational Structure</b> | 1. Collaboration or coordination with other water and sanitation organizations   | Blue   |
|                                    | 2. Organization is concerned with improving water and sanitation program quality | Blue   |
|                                    | 3. Organization is sustainable and maintains solid business practices            | Green  |
| <b>B. Water Services</b>           | 4. Water system after construction   | Blue   |
|                                    | 5. All households in community have convenient access to a safe water supply     | Green  |
|                                    | 6. Water fee payment   | Yellow |

|   |  |        |
|---|--|--------|
|   | 7. Water board policy  | Green  |
| <b>C. Sanitation</b>                            | 8. Most people in the community have access to a sanitary toilet                                   | Green  |
|   | 9. Toilets are well-used in a sanitary manner and users are satisfied with the toilets             | Green  |
|   | 10. Users have replacement strategy for toilets not connected to sewage system                     | Blue   |
| <b>D. Hygiene Education</b>                     | 11. Household water use is sufficient to meet all needs for consumption/hygiene                    | Yellow |
|   | 12. Households demonstrate increased health and hygiene awareness over time                        | Green  |
| <b>E. Project Design and construction</b>       | 13. The community has legal authority for the water source and water system                        | Blue   |
|   | 14. Water quality is tested and treated appropriately  | Green  |
|   | 15. Water system is appropriately designed and well-constructed                                    | Yellow |
|   | 16. Toilets/sanitation system is appropriately designed and well-constructed                       | Yellow |
| <b>F. Water system Long-term O&amp;M</b>        | 17. System is well-used and users are satisfied with the system                                    | Green  |
|   | 18. Repairs are addressed quickly and system undergoes routine maintenance                         | Green  |
|   | 19. User fees are paid by beneficiaries & system is financially self-supporting                    | Yellow |
| <b>G. Water Source Protection</b>               | 20. An active water source protection or environmental education component exists in the community | Green  |
| <b>H. Community commitment &amp; management</b> | 21. Community makes a financial contribution to the capital cost of the project                    | Green  |
|   | 22. A competent local water board is created and functions effectively                             | Green  |

Criteria are grouped into eight main categories as shown above; below is the EP response to the evaluation in each broad category:

**A. Organizational structure**

EP does have a comprehensive 5-year Strategic Plan (2014-2018) that is approved by the board, reviewed annually and a revised every 5 years. However, during the assessment, staff were working from a detailed and internal version of the Strategic Plan still had the word draft on it, thus losing points.

EP's design standards meet the national standards but do not meet WFL standards. WFL's standards are aligned with the newest UN standards. EP is committed to providing the best water services possible based on the needs of the people EP serves and is moving towards the higher standard. (Nicaraguan national standards are also moving in this direction as well).

**B. Water services**

EP agrees that collection of water fee payments needs improvement. WFL found that some households are not charged a user fee for using the system and EP does not provide sufficient guidance for setting water fees. The EP Board of Directors recommends that staff health educators focus on reorganizing and training Water Boards and conduct monthly

visits to all communities to monitor collection of water fee payments. In the case of hand dug wells, communities commonly use an ad hoc water fee payment collection to meet their repair needs. Although EP agrees that water fee payments are important, we also note that ad hoc fees in the case of hand-dug wells seem to work well for the communities for most common repairs.

Water quality was noted as another area for improvement. Although EP staff teach communities about water quality through chlorination or other means, there is more to be done and EP is focusing on this.

WFL noted that not all households had 24 hours access to water in one community due to a rationing policy that was not being followed by all community members. Rationing is a fairly rare problem with partner communities. EP will nonetheless work to improve the situation with additional follow-up in communities with similar situations.

WFL pointed out that the Water Boards, in general, did not have a policy to allow for additional homes joining the water system. In future written agreements with communities, this will be added to lay out a clearer, consistent path for new homes.

### C. Sanitation

EP moved to double pit ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines in (date) and these scored well on sustainability. However older EP communities were built with single pit VIP latrines and, in some cases, not all homes had latrines. EP has evolved over the years and now strives for 100% sanitation coverage in each community that it works with. Similarly, although over 80% of the latrines were clean, 90% was needed to get a blue qualification in the category.

### D. Hygiene Education

WFL noted the high quality of EP's hygiene education program. 72% of homes had soap present which shows excellent progress; 80% was needed for a blue rating. EP agrees that EP educational staff should emphasize the importance of hygiene education even more on hand-washing and animal access to the house, among other topics.

Some water systems did not meet the WFL standard of 50 liters per capita per day (l/c/d), and hand-dug wells are unlikely to ever meet this standard (hand-dug wells have been the main EP water project developed). The national standard and WHO standard is still 15 l/c/d which EP does meet. Although EP desires to meet this 50 l/c/d standard, it may not always be possible and EP feels it is better to do some projects at the lower standard on occasion if the context warrants, i.e. a piped system is not possible or a less productive water source is the only viable option that a community has. As recently as 2007, rural electrification was still under 30%. Piped systems are becoming more viable and more common, albeit significantly more expensive than a simple hand-dug well. EP plans to increase production of piped systems, but does not agree that hand-dug wells should be eliminated as an option from our portfolio.

### E. Design and Construction

2 of the 7 projects were damaged by natural disasters over the years, and WFL suggested that EP look at well design to account for this. Also, WFL design standards require a 20-year design period, but the national standard for hand-dug wells is 15 years. In 2015, the Nicaraguan national standards institute proposed changes to the national norms (although not yet approved) and among the changes the hand-dug wells life span has been increased to 20 years. In practice, we have found that our wells have lasted 20 and more years in most cases. EP staff will still revisit the hand-dug well design and see if improvements can be made.

There was not 100% sanitation coverage in the water projects visited, mainly in the case of a couple of the older projects. Although our newer projects strive to reach 100% sanitation coverage, EP will be revisiting older communities to consider options to improve coverage because of different EP policies in the past.

Water quality concerns were mentioned in this section. EP has relied on the government program of offering free chlorine to communities. However, in practice, the free chlorine is often not available for various reasons, and even when it is,

communities often don't use it. EP is focusing more heavily on water quality in its hygiene education program and has been piloting the use of biosand filters in the last few years.

The WFL evaluation also found EP did not have a standard design for family bathing facilities (the yellow ranking for sanitation systems refers to this, not toilets) – this is a project component that EP has not considered in the past (although EP does support the building *community* washing and bathing facilities). EP does not consider private bathing facilities a high priority at this time.

#### F. Operations and Maintenance

While most EP water systems have high usage rates, the two wells damaged by natural disasters did not have at least 90% of the community using the wells.

Another point was that older piped water systems did not have water flow meters to identify leaks. However, all the piped systems designed in the last 2-3 years now have these, so future evaluations should show improvement on this score. Wells do not have water meters.

Water fee payment collection is an area where EP is actively working to improve. EP did not meet the criteria of 75% or more of families paying their water bill regularly. See discussion in Section B. A further problem uncovered was the practice of loaning money from the funds collected that was causing tension in one community. This is not a practice that EP endorses and is something that EP will address by strengthening community policies.

#### G. Water Source Protection

In one community, the water quantity is fairly poor at the source, thus, the community implemented a program of rationing. The water is to be used for drinking only, but the evaluation showed that people are not following the rationing program. This is something that EP is looking into, although there are few projects with water rationing problems.

#### H. Community Commitment and Management

In this final section, again it is water fee payment collection that keeps EP from scoring higher. The evaluation found that the majority of community members were paying the fees, but there were high levels of late payments. With two of the wells, there were no payments at all. (Note: The English translation of the evaluation refers to “loan” payments—it should be translated as “late” payments.) Related to the fee issue, Water Boards were not able to save enough for major upgrades/repairs. Also, Water Boards were not enforcing the collection of fees, putting the sustainability of the system at risk. This is discussed further in section B and needs EP's attention.

Please contact [info@elporvenir.org](mailto:info@elporvenir.org) if you need more information on the evaluation and/or would like to see the original report in Spanish or English.