

# INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES PROSAR and AHJASA Programs in Honduras

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## Abstract

In addition to the TOM program, there are two other support mechanisms that offer operation and maintenance backup to the rural communities in Honduras. These important programs are briefly examined in this case study:

- PROSAR (Rural Water and Sanitation Project) managed jointly by the Ministry of Health and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- AHJASA (Honduran Water Board Association) established by Agua para el Pueblo.

Under PROSAR, Environmental Health Technicians (*Técnicos de Salud Ambiental* or TSAs) are based in health centers in municipalities and are responsible for coordinating the construction of new projects, training, and backup support to communities with existing systems. PROSAR operates exclusively in 905 communities in two departments in Honduras. In the AHJASA model, circuit riders provide support to communities that are members of the association. This model operates in six departments and has a total membership of 300 communities.

Although resources did not permit the development of full case studies for these models, they are presented because they offer two somewhat different approaches to providing backup support to rural communities.

## 1. Introduction

This case study examines two other programs for providing backup support to rural communities in managing their water supply and sanitation (WS&S) systems. Both of them operate on a regional scale rather than a national scale, in contrast to the TOM program. The motivation for establishing both of these programs was similar: ensuring the sustainability of rural WS&S systems.

The programs discussed below are PROSAR (Rural Water and Sanitation Project), managed jointly by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and AHJASA (Honduran Water Board Association), established by *Agua para el Pueblo* (APP), a Honduran NGO. The PROSAR project bases Environmental Health Technicians in health centers, while in the AHJASA model, circuit riders provide support to communities that are members of an association of water boards.

## 2. PROSAR

### *Background*

PROSAR is a rural water supply and sanitation (WS&S) project that aims to develop sanitary infrastructure and provide training in environmental health. It began operation in January 1998 and will end in December 2000. A follow-up project to PROSAR is currently being developed and is expected to commence in January 2001. The MOH and SDC have been collaborating in WS&S projects for rural communities in Honduras for more than 20 years.

PROSAR, developed from a previous project called PROPAR<sup>1</sup>, includes a specific component to provide communities with backup support for the operation and maintenance of the WS&S systems. The evaluation of PROPAR found that although training the water boards in water system operation and maintenance was essential, it was still necessary to provide ongoing support to the communities to guarantee the sustainability of the infrastructure. Such a support program was incorporated as an integral component of the new PROSAR project design. In addition to direct program support for rural communities, the proposal included plans to encourage the formation of water board associations and even an initiative for private sector participation to provide backup support to the water boards.

### *Financing*

PROSAR has a total budget of approximately \$1.3 million over the 3-year project period. The SDC contribution to the budget is around 69%, the MOH provides 25%, and the remaining 6% comes from diverse sources. The proportion of the budget given to the backup component of the program is not specified.

### *Area of Influence*

The project was designed to operate in the 905 communities within the 33 municipalities of the departments of Santa Barbara and Cortés. These municipalities form a part of “Health Region No. 3” as defined by the MOH. The feasibility study identified 210 communities as needing water systems; the remaining 695 had existing services built by other institutions. This latter group was targeted to receive training, education, and organizational support. Unlike the TOM program, PROSAR offers support to communities with water systems of any type. This reflects the PROSAR strategy of building diverse types of water systems, including piped systems with public standpipes and hand-dug wells or boreholes fitted with handpumps. PROSAR gives preference to construction of gravity-fed systems with household connections where technical and economic conditions permit.

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<sup>1</sup> MOH - SDC rural water and sanitation project in operation from 1986 to 1997.  
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## *Management and Organization*

Community support is provided through Environmental Health Technicians (in Spanish, *Técnicos de Salud Ambiental*, or TSAs). The 37 TSAs operate from the health centers in rural municipalities, and each is responsible for an average of 25 communities. Typically, the TSAs each manage around five new or rehabilitation projects, and the remainder of their time is dedicated to the support program. The TSAs are supervised by four Area Coordinators, who in turn are supported by technical and managerial personnel.

The operation and maintenance (O&M) model of PROSAR is founded on community visits by the TSA. There are four main mechanisms that lead to a community visit by the TSA:

- Direct community request for assistance from the TSA
- Routine visit to the community to conduct the required quarterly water quality analysis.
- Recommendation by the health center to which the TSA is attached for a community visit because of high illness incidence related to environmental conditions
- Request from the Municipal Development Committee (CODEM - Comité de Desarrollo Municipal) that the TSA visit a particular community.

## *Methodology and Strategies*

The PROSAR program initiates activities in a community visit by first carrying out a detailed evaluation of the environmental health situation. This is broadly similar to the SANAA classification survey, but in addition to a review of the management, operation, and condition of the water system, it also call for an assessment of refuse disposal. Having completed this evaluation, the TSA presents the results to the community in a general meeting (rather than to the water board). The TSA serves as a facilitator to help the community draw conclusions about the deficiencies of its water and sanitation systems. The aim is for the community to decide for itself any actions to be taken and to assign responsibility. PROSAR views community water boards as the service provider. Presenting the deficiencies to the entire community puts pressure on the water board to take action. At the general meeting, there is also an opportunity for the community to address other activities, such as improving refuse disposal or protecting the micro-watershed. The TSA will then offer training sessions related to the conclusions of the environmental health evaluation, for example, tariff-setting, protection of the micro-watershed, system chlorination, system maintenance, refuse disposal, etc. The TSA plans a series of visits with the community to carry out a training program. This usually takes the form of weekly visits to try to bring about rapid improvement. Once the training program is completed, the TSA continues to visit the community, initially on a monthly basis to ensure that training has been effective, and later on the basis of community requests or for quarterly water quality analysis.

Generally, the TSA responds quickly to a request to visit a community, unless the quarterly water quality analysis takes priority. These quarterly checks are given considerable importance. Water samples are processed at one of the four regional PROSAR offices. The TSA is responsible for sample collection and reporting the results to the community. The

sampling may be done by the TSA or the water board, having first received training from the TSA. An important aspect of the water quality control is that the TSA will present the results to the community in a general meeting. Again, the aim is to stimulate community action if the water quality does not meet MOH standards<sup>2</sup>.

An important PROSAR strategy is to support the CODEMs with environmental health advice and training by the TSA. As mentioned above, the CODEMS may pass on a request to the TSA to visit a community with water system problems. These municipal committees are formed by 7 to 10 of the most active community leaders, who work voluntarily with the mayor's office to manage and plan local development initiatives. The CODEMS were created as a response to the Municipal Law that imposes responsibility for local development on the municipalities. The bimonthly meetings take place in the municipal office and are attended by the TSA and municipal representative. PROSAR's strategy aims to strengthen the community/municipality links and the institutional capacity of the municipalities. A spin-off from the policy of collaboration with the municipalities has been the contracting of former MOH promoters to work directly for the municipalities as TSAs. Currently 10 municipalities from the areas covered by the PROPAR and PROSAR projects have taken on promoters to advise communities on water, sanitation, and environmental management.

The basic PROSAR model of providing backup support has also been adopted for use in communities that were originally covered by PROPAR. Without the additional resources provided by SDC, certain logistical difficulties have arisen, fewer training sessions occur, and there is only limited water quality monitoring. However, there have been some significant developments in the follow-up work to the PROPAR project that are important to mention. For example, 12 water boards from the municipalities San Manuel, El Progreso and La Lima have formed an inter-ministerial association. The aim is to organize its own O&M support system. Also of note, the association has elected a female president. Another important development has been the formation of a private enterprise known as APTOS (*Agua para Todos*) which offers water and sanitation backup support to communities in the department of Yoro. APTOS was established by six former MOH promoters who worked in the PROPAR project. Through municipal contracts, APTOS has provided services such as evaluation of community water system problems and water board training.

### **3. AHJASA**

#### *Background*

The origin of AHJASA dates to 1990 when a representative of the U.S. National Rural Water Association (NRWA) made a visit to Honduras to study water system problems faced by rural communities. Together with APP a study was undertaken to determine the principal problems faced by community water boards in maintaining their systems and, specifically, to measure the level of interest in forming an association of water boards.

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<sup>2</sup> The MOH standards are based on the WHO water quality guidelines.  
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Although the study duration was planned for some 10 months, it was quickly established that there was considerable interest in forming an association. In November 1990 AHJASA was formed, initially with 17 community members in the department of Valle.

A member of APP's staff was selected to coordinate activities with AHJASA and was sent to the United States for training in the basic concepts and principals of the NRWA. The concept of the circuit rider was first introduced to Honduras as a result of this training opportunity. The basic principals of the NRWA were adapted to Honduran conditions and the AHJASA membership was offered the advisory services of a circuit rider. The main objectives of AHJASA are to:

- Offer training to water boards in the administration and maintenance of water and sanitation systems
- Provide technical and organizational advice
- Facilitate mutual assistance between the AHJASA members

### *Financing*

The financing of AHJASA and the circuit riders is mainly provided by the International Rural Water Association (IRWA, the international committee of the NRWA). The annual budget is US\$ 38,000 of which approximately 80% is provided by IRWA, 15% by APP, and the remaining 5% by monthly membership fees. The latter are based on the number of system users per community. The membership fee is currently set at Lps.0.50 (approximately \$0.03) per user. Thus, for a community with 60 water system users the monthly fee is Lps.30 (\$2.04). Although the proportion of the total cost paid by the membership is small, it does provide incentive to the membership to participate in AHJASA and demonstrates that the water boards are expressing demand for backup support to better manage their water systems.

### *Area of Influence*

AHJASA currently works in six departments (Valle, Choluteca, Francisco Morazan, La Paz, Olancho, and Yoro) and has a total membership of around 300 communities. Membership is open to communities with any type of water system: piped (gravity or pumped), hand-dug wells, or boreholes. Although it would be seen desirable to expand its membership, AHJASA is actually stretched to capacity, given its current budget.

### *Management and Organization*

The organizational structure of AHJASA could be described as part of the "bottom up" strategy. For each department where AHJASA operates there is a board of representatives elected from the community members. Similarly, there is a national board consisting of members elected during the annual general meeting. The management of AHJASA is largely the responsibility of the departmental and national boards. On a monthly basis the circuit riders present a summary of their activities to the departmental boards. The latter provide guidance to the circuit riders in terms of work priorities and requests from member communities for assistance with specific problems. The circuit riders are not given a target

number of communities to visit each month, but instead they are expected to respond to the demand and needs expressed by AHJASA members. At the national level, the AHJASA board, APP coordinator, and circuit riders meet periodically to decide on overall AHJASA strategy and aims.

AHJASA has very few salaried personnel: four circuit riders, each having responsibility for an average of 75 communities, one coordinator, and one administrator/secretary. The departmental and national board representatives of AHJASA participate on a voluntary basis.

### *Methodology and Strategies*

AHJASA has promoted a gradual increase in its membership by developing a set of services designed to support community water boards in better managing their systems. These services have been modified and improved according to demands from community water boards and problem diagnosis by the circuit riders. The benefits currently available to AHJASA members include:

- Technical support in resolving administrative and O&M problems
- Assistance in developing proposals for new systems or extensions
- The sale of bookkeeping and administration stationery at low cost
- The sale of replacement parts for various types of handpumps
- The sale of chlorine in granular form (65%) for system disinfection and solution (1%) for household water disinfection
- Provision of water quality analysis services, sanitary inspections, and risk analysis
- Preparation of documentation for application for legal recognition of the water boards.

Similar to the TOM program, AHJASA circuit riders provide hands-on training to the water boards through regular visits to the communities. If a training or technical problem is beyond the capability of a circuit rider, he will ask for assistance from another circuit rider, engineer, or other specialist. Training is offered to the community water boards on the following subjects:

- Water system operation, maintenance, and administration
- Management of the micro-watershed
- Maintenance of latrines and sanitary education
- Bookkeeping and maintaining bank accounts.

Training is provided both informally during individual community visits and formally in group sessions, when funding is available. New AHJASA members receive training in all of the above topics to equip the water board with the basic knowledge needed to manage the water system. Once a water board has received the basic training modules, further training is carried out when requested or when community elections result in new water board members.

An important strategy of AHJASA is for the circuit riders to make routine community visits, during which they can advise on technical and administrative problems. If necessary, follow-up visits can be planned. The circuit riders also respond to requests from water board members that contact the APP or AHJASA offices. Visits are also made to some communities simply because of the lapse of time that has passed since the previous visit. For example, if the community record indicates that no contact has been made for a period of months, the monthly schedule for the Circuit Rider will include that community.

Occasionally the circuit riders are asked to get involved in conflict resolution relating to a problem with the water system. Typical examples include contamination of water sources by unregulated agricultural practices, disputes over water source use, and nonpayment of monthly service tariffs.

The objective of fostering mutual assistance is one of the most significant differences between water board associations such as AHJASA and the TOM or PROSAR programs. Water board associations such as AHJASA contribute greatly to developing the management capacity of community water boards. During training seminars attended by several water boards or in departmental board meetings, there is an opportunity to compare notes on local experiences and to discuss problems and their solutions. This process is thought to be very effective for promoting the self-confidence of water board members, leading to better water system management and further improvement.

#### **4. Summary**

The most significant difference between PROSAR and AHJASA, aside from the scale of the programs, is their basic strategies. In the case of PROSAR, a “top down” approach is taken, whereas AHJASA is rooted at the community level and adopts more of a “bottom up” strategy. The latter is attractive as it exemplifies the current preference for demand-led development. However, the PROSAR approach also has advantages as professional management of the program contributes to its effective and efficient implementation. Furthermore, PROSAR uses participative techniques to involve the community in decision-making and problem-solving.

The programs also contrast in their focus on approaching the problem of supporting community development. AHJASA takes a narrow focus, concentrating its efforts on the technical and administrative problems of managing the water system, whereas PROSAR takes a more holistic view by treating water system O&M as just one element of preventive public health care.

Both programs emphasize capacity-building through training. Water quality analysis is also a feature of both programs. It is clear, however, that PROSAR has much greater capacity to provide communities with regular water quality testing, an important tool for encouraging communities to chlorinate their water supply. AHJASA has established a chlorine bank program that supplies communities with chlorine at low cost. Although PROSAR also

promotes the use of chlorine for water disinfection, communities can get free supplies from municipal health centers, which might be viewed as a continuation of state paternalism.

An important advantage of PROSAR is the relatively small number of communities assigned to each TSA and the integrated approach to providing backup support to rural communities. One of the positive qualities of PROSAR has been a flexible approach to working with private enterprises, as well as supporting local government with the CODEMs and municipal associations. These relationships and associations have ensured that there was some follow-up to the earlier PROPAR project.

The strength of AHJASA lies in community involvement in the management of activities and program development. The program has tried to reduce community dependence on external institutions and encourage self-confidence through sharing common experiences and solutions to water system problems. This approach would also seem likely to contribute to overall community development.

Both AHJASA and PROSAR depend heavily on external funding, without which they could not operate. Although PROSAR has a set term, a follow-up project is already in the making. If the SDC were to pull out, it is doubtful that the new project would become a reality. It is true that the MOH has implemented the PROSAR methodology in the PROPAR beneficiary communities, albeit on a much reduced scale. The same scenario applies to AHJASA, the only difference being that it has no fixed duration. If funding were not provided by IRWA or another source, its activities would be severely limited. It is quite possible, however, that the departmental associations would continue to survive, as they tend to view AHJASA as their own community development organization.



## Acronyms

AHJASA	<i>Asociación Hondureña de Juntas Administrativas de Agua y Saneamiento</i> (Honduran Water Board Association)
APP	<i>Agua para el Pueblo</i> , a Honduran NGO
APTOS	<i>Agua para Todos</i> (a private firm which provides water and sanitation backup support to communities in the department of Yoro)
CNSP	<i>Comisión Nacional de Servicios Públicos</i> (National Commission of Public Services)
CODEM	<i>Comité de Desarrollo Municipal</i> (Municipal Development Committee)
FHIS	<i>Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social</i> (Honduran Social Investment Fund)
IRWA	International Rural Water Association, a committee of NRWA
MOH	Ministry of Health
NRWA	U.S. National Rural Water Association
O&M	operations and maintenance
PROSAR	<i>Programa de Saneamiento Rural</i> (Rural Water and Sanitation Project)
PROPAR	<i>Proyecto de Pozos y Acueductos Rurales</i> (a rural water and sanitation project, 1986-1997, supported by MOH and SDC)
SANAA	National Water Supply and Sewerage Company
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIAR	<i>Sistema de Información de Acueductos Rurales</i> (Rural Water Information System)
TSA	<i>Técnico de Salud Ambiental</i> (Environmental Health Technician)
TOM	Technical Operation and Maintenance project; Technician in Operation and Maintenance
WS&S	water supply and sanitation