

Successful Municipal Experiences in Brazil: Public Utility Service in Water and Sanitation

*Silvano Silvério da Costa, Brazil**

(*) Civil Engineer (Engineering College FE-FUMEC-1986). Master in Environmental Technology and Water Resources (DE/FT/Unb – 2002). Director of Maintenance and Operation of the Autonomous Service of Water and Sewage of Guarulhos – SAAE. President of the Brazilian National Association of Municipal Services of Sanitation – ASSEMAE and Secretary General of the National Front for Environmental Sanitation, Brazilian Chapter of Red VIDA.

Address: Rua Coral, nr 55, apartment 503, Cidade Maia, Guarulhos, São Paulo, Brazil, ZIP: 07.115-060, e-mail: presidencia@assem-ae.org.br. Telephone: +55 11 6472 5301.

This article summarises twenty successful experiences of public utility service in of water supply and sanitation. Examples of the key principles used in this selection are; universal access, equity, [integrality of actions] integration across service elements, integration across service sectors, quality of services, social control (a specific democratic process) and municipal responsibility.

Key characteristics within public utility services are emphasized in order to contribute to debate, both in Brazil and internationally, on the best way of providing water and sanitation, whether this is public or private. ASSEMAE (National Association of Municipal Services of Water and Sanitation) believes that such services can be provided in a public manner, which involves and guarantees the control and participation by the citizen.

1. INTRODUCTION

ASSEMAE – a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization – was created in 1984. It aims to defend and promote the interests of municipal public utility service for the supply of water, sanitation, handling of solid residues and rain water. This also involves engagement in the struggle against the privatization of these services.

In Brazil, there are approximately 1800 municipalities responsible for providing water and 4000 municipalities running sewage collection services. They vary enormously in size in terms of population: small, medium and large (many capital cities and municipalities have over 500,000 inhabitants).

These experiences demonstrate the rich diversity of water and sewage services in Brazilian municipalities and each case brings its own particularity and nuances. This experience acts as an advocate for the need to intensify cooperation and association among municipalities.

Similarly, there are municipalities with important experiences that are not part of this publication. However, this does not deny their immense contribution to the Brazilian sanitation structure.

Our objective is for Public Power, social agents, public institutions and civil associations to be able to discuss and benefit from experiences of the Municipalities, sharing methods of collective work.

2. METHODOLOGY FOR THE SELECTION OF EXPERIENCES

In the selection of ‘successful experience’ the following principles and guidelines were used (BRAZIL, 2004):

*To be regarded as a successful experience, a water and sanitation system must (i) meet in a satisfactory manner **all** of the following principles or (ii) meet in an exemplary manner **one or more** of these principles¹:*

- **Universal access** – universal provision to the target population;

- **Equity** – all receive the same quality of services, irrespective of social-economic status and urban situation in which they live;
- **Integrity** – integration across service elements; provision with an integrated vision, that understands sanitation as a set of actions, involving, at the very least, water supply, sanitation, public cleansing, rain drainage and control of vectors;
- **Municipal Responsibility** – recognition of and respect for municipal autonomy, in line with constitutional requirements;
- **Public Management** - the understanding that sanitation services are public by definition, provided by a public entity by nature, organized as a direct administration organization, public company, or public and private joint stock company. In this final case the decision-making process must rest in the hands of those responsible for the service;
- **Participation and social control** – All interests are represented through an open, visible and participatory process. The population is ultimate owners of the service and its equipment.
- **Integration across sectors** – integration with planning and action associated with urban development, public health, and environmental and water resources. This is where the sanitation system is considered essential in these other areas of policy-action and in the final instance, it is recognized that this is complicated by nature.
- **Quality of services** – which includes regularity, continuity, efficiency, safety, up-to-date, courtesy and moderation of costs;
- **Access** – tariff policy compatible with users' purchasing power, according to the practice of price moderation.

The municipalities selected are those that provide their services of water supply and sanitation in an autonomous and direct manner, by means of public companies, departments and other arrangements, and where these function within the municipalities.

The municipalities selected and those that met these criteria and principles were: Alagoinhas, Araraquara, Campinas, Caxias do Sul, Guairá, Guarulhos, Ibiporã, Ituiutaba, Jaboticabal, Passos, Penápolis, Piracicaba, Poços de Caldas, Porto Alegre, Sacramento, Santo André, Uberlândia, Unai, Viçosa and Volta Redonda. This list includes areas diverse in region and population and kind of service provider (although the latter is always public).

3. MAIN STRENGTHS OF MUNICIPALITIES SELECTED

Below are a list of outstanding examples of some of the twenty experiences selected. They are grouped according to main attributes.

Participation and social control

In 2001, the municipality of Alagoinhas in Bahia was the first Brazilian municipality to approve its Environmental Sanitation Policy in a participatory format through a Conference. It was a pioneered integration with the Environmental Sanitation, Health and Environment Inter-Sector Conference. The Municipality has just enhanced the Municipal Plan for Environmental Sanitation, with an agreement signed between the Municipal government and Federal University of Bahia. SAAE promotes works on sanitation with techniques of social mobilization, and involves the participation of the community.

Universal Services

Since the creation of the Service of Water and Sewage of Araraquara, São Paulo has achieved universal access, treating and distributing 100% of the water and treating 100% of sewage collected and working with resources obtained from their respective tariffs. Since 1969, the population of Araraquara, São Paulo, has increased threefold, yet total service coverage has been maintained. Service quality has continued alongside social control. The Service of Water and Sewage incorporated the management of solid residues just over a year ago and is preparing to take on the drainage of rainwater.

Since the 1970s, the city of Guairá, São Paulo has achieved 100% coverage in sanitation. This is the result of by public administration prioritizing basic sanitation infrastructure projects and ambulatory health services. Administrative continuity and planning also contributed to the city achieving universal service. In order to guarantee quality, water resources management is now being combined with the municipality's management of sanitation.

The city of Unai, Minas Gerais, has 100% of its water treated and 100% of its sewage collected and treated. Permanent investments with resources gathered from tariffs made it possible to follow the incredible growth of this city. In the last 10 years, child mortality rates have been halved.

The Autonomous Service of Water and Sewage of Guarulhos have as its mission: to make universal the supply of drinking water and the collection of sewage without polluting the watercourses; and to provide quality services at a fair price. There have been steps forward, recognised by users for example, in the treatment of sanitary sewage. Furthermore, during the last four years, 50 thousand families without water supply now have this essential public service. However challenges remain.

Services with focus on the citizen

Sanasa – Public Company of Sanitation of Campinas – is a high tech public company reducing water losses by monitoring and policies which rationalise use. Sanasa is also open to social control. The three Conferences on Sanitation held by the Municipality defeated the attempt to privatize the company and denounced the Bill 4147/2001 that may have transferred, to the State of São Paulo, decisions on the running of this sanitation service. Sanasa is an example of a public company committed to the population.

Of the 153 providers from the Superintendence of Water and Sewage of Ituiutaba – SAE, 90 are directly involved in a relationship with the consumer. SAE does monthly 'after service' research, with a sample of clients that have made service requests in Commercial and Maintenance areas. This research has showed satisfaction rates of over 90%.

Planning

Caxias do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, is the second largest municipality in that state based on population size. Its economy is based on industrial activity and faces the challenge of increasing the percentage of sewage treated from 6% to 100%. The city has sought partnership with the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul for integrated planning of sanitation and the drainage of rain water. The idea is to take advantage of the structure of mixed sewage collecting systems that covers 85% of the city.

With the creation of The National Metallurgy of Iron and Steel Company, the Municipality of Volta Redonda, Rio de Janeiro, is the cradle of Brazilian metallurgy of iron and steel. In 1993, in the face of economic recession, Volta Redonda moved on its own initiative to incorporate new management practices in order to meet the demand for efficient public services. One of the main examples of this modern management is the Autonomous Service of Water and Sewage, which adopted a wide-ranging program to fight against losses and the consequent recovery of revenue.

Public-Public Partnerships

There are experiences in Brazil where municipalities come together in consortium, to provide sanitation services to more than one municipality. In Iporã, Paraná, effective public water services contribute to the health of urban and rural populations, including a child mortality rate far below the national average. An inter-municipal consortium (where a group of municipalities provide water services for more than one municipality) is seen as a way of roll out this city's achievements in water management to other towns.

Public savings for investment

Jaboticabal, São Paulo, has resisted a private concession for the treatment of sewage. In order to achieve necessary investments for the construction of a sewage treatment plant (ETE), the Municipality created an unprecedented special fund, which is audited by civil society. ETE is being constructed on land donated by the State of São Paulo University, with the condition that sanitation remains in public management and that research is integrated into its operational planning.

From external help to the consolidation of services in a sustainable way

Sacramento, Minas Gerais, was one of the 99 municipal services of sanitation created in Brazil by the Program of Water Supply for small Communities. It began in 1966 with a loan contract. The objective of this Program was to implement water supply systems in municipalities with populations' ranging from 5 to 40 thousand. This loan enabled the construction of water supply services in many states in the country. Twenty-Two of them in the state of Minas Gerais.

Service integration

In 1999, The Municipal Service of Water and Sanitation of Santo André, São Paulo - Semasa – became the first sanitation organization in the country to integrate all the components of the service: water, sewage, solid residues and urban drainage. More recently, it also became responsible for other tasks such as environmental management. Integrating these allowed a sophisticated arrangement of internal subsidy, through which sectors where costs are not re-covered by tariffs could be sustained by surplus in other service areas. This increased opportunities for universal access.

The universal offer of service in water, sewage and solid residues was guaranteed by a continuing policy of investment, sustained by the participation of and control by users in the Deliberative Council of Water and Sewage Autarchy of Penápolis, São Paulo. The challenge is now to search for sustainability in the rural environment.

The Capital of municipal sanitation

Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, the country's cradle of participating democracy, instituted popular participation through a 'public budget'. DMAE, municipal company, is the largest totally municipal sanitation service provider in Brazil and has received an international award for its involvement the global movement against the privatization of this essential service. In this capital city, the society is the protagonist of its history.

4. CONCLUSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The experiences presented are by no means a complete picture of efficient public providers in Brazil. They are merely examples of good practice. This was intended as an outline and could have included other efficient public operators, including state-level water companies. In Brazil, there is a group of other efficient public operators, including those in state-level companies that could very well have been presented here, however, an outline of public and municipal service provided was established.]

Based on these experiences, ASSEMAE believes that it is possible to achieve quality universal service in water supply and sanitation, in an equitable manner when this is based on a professional management geared towards the interests of the citizens and involves austerity in the use of public resources. There are many ways of improving the management of services in order to guarantee investment based on generated resources.

We know that in order to be efficient, it is not sufficient to be public. We have a lot to do in order to improve public services that are provided to the population. However, by pointing out the strengths in this experience, we would like, to contribute to the debate. From this experience, one may identify possible actions and types of organization and management which will support in Brazil, in the Americas and around the world, the quest for universal access to services of water supply and sanitation, in ways that ensure equity, courtesy, quality and social control.

Finally, there is a new trend emerging in Brazil, with the passing of Law 11.107 in 2005. This is encouraging municipalities to form a consortium which provide, regulate, plan and supervise the services of sanitation. This arrangement may contribute to what we call “economies of scale”, where actions that are not possible within a small municipality may be possible by a group. We are calling this arrangement a public-public partnership.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE

Based on BRAZIL, MINISTRY OF HEALTH; OPAS. *Evaluation of impact in the health of sanitation actions*: a conceptual landmark and methodological strategy. Pan American Health Organization: Brasília, 2004. 116p.
