

WEFTA POLICY FOR PRIORITIZING PROJECTS IN LATIN AMERICA

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The Water Engineers for the Americas (WEFTA) is a non-profit organization located in New Mexico in the southwestern part of the United States. The primary goal of WEFTA is to assist communities (primarily smaller communities) in Latin America with technical advice, engineering designs, and construction management for water and wastewater projects. An additional goal is to improve technical and organizational capacity of water and sanitation specialists in Latin America. The technical people involved with WEFTA projects are engineers, architects, and scientists, many of whom are bilingual in English and Spanish.

WEFTA also provides limited funding to assist Latin American communities in construction of projects. Because WEFTA is a small organization, and the need for WEFTA services in Latin America is large, it is necessary for WEFTA to prioritize projects for funding. The criteria that WEFTA uses in the process of selecting projects to support includes the following: community need, community involvement, public health issues, cost effectiveness, legal issues, project sustainability, project personnel, and other issues. Each of these criteria is discussed below:

Community Need

WEFTA's goal is to help communities most in need. This means that funding priority will typically be given to more impoverished communities without existing access to clean water or proper sanitation. For example, a small community whose source of drinking water is a stream or shallow well contaminated by human and/or livestock wastes would typically have a higher priority than a resort town with existing drinking water or sanitation infrastructure whose system needs updating/improvement. It should be noted that, while WEFTA funding is prioritized based on community need, WEFTA welcomes partnerships with Latin American communities wishing to improve the technical capabilities of their staffs or wishing to assist with design and/or construction management of proposed projects.

Community Involvement

WEFTA has learned that community involvement is essential for the long-term success of projects in Latin America. WEFTA looks at the following factors regarding community involvement:

Funding—the community should provide and/or arrange for the maximum feasible funding for the project. This can include community cash and in-kind contributions, local fund raisers, other government funding (such as grants or loans from municipal, regional or national governments), or funding from non-government organizations (NGOs) such as churches or service clubs like Rotary International. If a significant portion of the funding is to come from out-of-country NGOs, an in-country organization should be involved to coordinate funding details (such as a local church if the funding is provided by an out-of-country church, or a local service club if the funding is to be provided by an out-of-country service club).

Commitment of community members—WEFTA prefers projects where the members of the community enthusiastically support the project. This means that virtually all members of the community are in agreement that the project is desirable and are willing to participate in the project (for example, by connecting to a completed water system). In addition, the members of the community should be willing to provide non-skilled construction labor for the project to the maximum feasible extent. Most of WEFTA's projects are small water supply projects using simple

technologies. The members of the community should be willing to provide the majority of the “sweat equity” for the project, such as digging ditches, laying pipelines, and constructing simple structures.

Public Health Issues

WEFTA places high priority on projects for communities that are suffering human health or environmental issues due to contaminated water supplies or inadequate wastewater treatment. An example would be a community whose current source of drinking water is contaminated, and the problem can be addressed through technologies such as locating another source or providing simple water treatment. Another example would be a community that currently has a wastewater collection system but is contaminating downstream waters by discharging wastewater directly into a stream or river. If comparatively simple technologies for the community to construct and maintain (such as lagoon treatment) are feasible, this would be preferred by WEFTA.

Cost Effectiveness

The preference of WEFTA is for projects that can benefit the greatest number of people at the lowest cost per person. This means that projects that involve simple technologies (which tend to be the least costly) are preferred. In addition, communities with higher densities of development are preferred because they minimize the infrastructure required (for example, shorter lengths of pipelines) for each person served.

Legal Issues

WEFTA prefers projects in which the community has already addressed (or can easily address) any legal issues. This includes having the legal entity in place to construct and maintain the project. For a smaller community, an acceptable legal entity could be a water board composed of members of the community. For a larger community, an acceptable entity could be a public works department. The community should also be able to readily address other legal issues such as rights-of-way or easements for pipelines, and land ownership (or easements) for project facilities such as water sources (e.g., wells, spring catchment works) and storage tanks.

Project Sustainability

WEFTA has found that effective long-term operation and maintenance of projects is critical for their continued sustainability. Therefore, WEFTA prefers projects in communities that are committed to long-term operation and maintenance. In addition, communities must identify (or be willing to train) maintenance personnel and be willing to fund the long-term operation and maintenance of the project, usually through a regular assessment of community members or user fees for the users of the system.

Project Personnel

WEFTA experience has shown that in-country technical representatives are essential for successful implementation of projects. These technical representatives provide coordination of project issues, training for the local residents doing project construction, technical interpretation of design documents, and construction quality control. These in-country representatives typically have technical education and experience such as architecture, engineering, or hydrogeology. They can be employees of local NGOs such as Suma Jayma in Bolivia or Habitat for Humanity in

El Salvador, or they can be individuals (sometimes retirees) that assist the local communities. It is helpful if the in-country representative is bilingual, however, that is not essential since many of the WEFTA personnel are bilingual.

Other Issues

The WEFTA preference is for projects with a minimum of issues that might increase technical difficulty or increase project costs. For instance, if a wastewater treatment project includes lagoon treatment, sufficient land under the control of the community should be available. Similarly, it is better if a water supply system has a sufficient source of clean water (such as a spring) available nearby which does not require significant treatment and can be transported by a gravity pipeline to the community.