



## CASE STUDY

# Venezuela: Participatory management of water resources in Tovar municipality

## Summary

To supply water to a growing population, an aqueduct was built in the watershed of El Limón River in Tovar municipality. However, this aqueduct does not provide sufficient supply, creating conflicts among the communities. To solve these, agreements on the use and conservation of water resources have been made among the communities, involving both rural villages and urban areas. This illustrates the benefits of a participatory approach.

## Background

Tovar municipality is located at the northeast of Aragua state and in the centre of Venezuela's coast. It includes villages and towns from the coast to the mountain. The population is estimated to be near 20,000 inhabitants (year 2008).

In 1964, the Colonia Tovar and surroundings was designated as tourist area and Natural Park. The area is important for its biodiversity as well as its rich water resources. The rivers originating in this area provide drinking water to several towns in Vargas and Aragua states including the capital Caracas.

In an effort to supply water to the growing population, in 1981 an aqueduct was built in the watershed of El Limón River. Tovar municipality draws its water mainly from this aqueduct.

However, the villages and sectors of Colonia Tovar do not adequately receive water from the aqueduct and they have to seek for other alternatives. A fight for the location of new connections in relation to the existing ones has produced conflicts in communities living at Tovar municipality.

These conflicts get worse during the dry season with strong disputes between neighbours, going from street discussions to tube cuts. Disposal of sewage directly to a Tuy River affluent at Colonia Tovar and a garbage dump on the high mountain areas of Cumbote Village is also a problem.

## Actions taken

Communal councils have been formed to address drinking water supply and sewage disposal issues. Also, it helps to produce documents of formal agreements for the recovery of environmental damage and reforestation in areas deforested by agricultural activities.

The agreements limit deforestation at the headwaters and agricultural activity is also limited to prevent destruction of vegetation cover. There are also communal agreements that regulate the access to water, 96 families from the village have benefited from the rational use of this resource.

To solve the conflicts communities have made agreements on the use and conservation of water resources at Tovar municipality. The agreements involve both rural villages and urban areas.

At the level of national authorities, Sewage Treatment Plant of Colonia Tovar is being build which is estimated to benefit a population up to 12,000 inhabitants of the urban area. This plant will contribute in improving the sanitation of Tuy River basin considered important for increasing water supply.

Communities in Colonia Tovar have organized themselves in communal councils and this provides spaces for participation, articulation diverse community based issues. This further allows people to implement the management of public policies and projects.

Project of Dam construction at Las Peonías Sector and a new drinking water distribution network at Costa de Maya Sector as a midterm solution to the drinking water scarcity are planned.

## **Outcomes**

The City Hall of Tovar Municipality has applied the principle of citizen participation to meet the objective of its Government Plans related to recovery and maintenance of water basins and micro basins, through the implementation of weekly meetings with communal councils. However, the lack of technical support to formulate projects and since many of the communal initiatives is in progress, there are no impact indicators of the actions taken. Since the decision to carry out weekly meetings is a management decision of the current Mayor, the sustainability of this mechanism will be threatened when the local government changes. The challenge is if the next Mayor will consider the benefits that this mechanism gives to its work.

## **Lessons Learned**

Communal councils have shown that they can participate actively on the decision-making process to establish regulations for water supply in rural villages. However, such regulations are mainly verbal agreements that still need more legal support.

Communal councils as organizations with a community base may be involved in decision-making process needed for water resources management in Colonia Tovar. Their success depends on their capacity on project formulation and management with effective transfer of budget and responsibilities.

Participatory approach on water development and ,management, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels, taking decisions at the lowest appropriate level pays off, with full public consultation and involvement of users in the planning and implementation of water projects.

The case study also shows the potential benefits of transferring responsibilities to the municipalities, as established by the Law for Drinking Water and Sanitation Services. The decision-making process on a local problem is closer to the people directly involved.

**Corresponding Author**

Salas, Viviana

**Corresponding Author Contact**

direccion@bioparques.org

**Organisation**

BioParques Venezuela

**Year**

2013

**Country**

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

**Keywords**

Population growth , El Limón River Basin , Aqueduct , Aragua State

**Thematic Tagging**

Urban , Water services , Gender

Language English

**Supporting Materials**

GWP South America

**Related IWRM Tools**

Public sector water utilities, Civil Society Organisations

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**Source URL:** <https://iwrmaactionhub.org/case-study/venezuela-participatory-management-water-resources-tovar-municipality>