



## Solving Critical Water Problems in El Salvador

El Zúngano is a typical rural community in central El Salvador suffering from many economic and social problems. A lack of clean water has always been the main complaint of the 2,100 residents. Years of deforestation and poor management practices left the six square kilometer watershed that supplies water to the community in very poor condition.

The impact of the depleted watershed was both environmental and economic. Surface waters dried up in the summer and flooded in winter. Residents paid high prices for poor quality drinking water - up to ten times the price of water normally paid in tariffs charged to water system users - because delivery of water had to be made in barrels carried on ox carts.

USAID's AGUA Activity (Access, Management, and Rational Use of Water) had begun agro-forestry programs in El Zúngano and through this activity, residents were prompted to request help in resolving their water problems. AGUA responded by concentrating on the development of local management capacity. The El Zúngano Watershed Organization, made up of farmers, schoolteachers, business owners, and municipal and national government representatives, was formed to address the community's water issues.



Photo: CARE

El Zúngano watershed organization members plan conservation interventions.

USAID addresses the needs of poor, rural Salvadorans - particularly women and youth through assistance programs totaling about \$35 million a year. The El Zúngano Watershed Organization members were trained in soil and water conservation, risk mitigation, and solid and liquid waste disposal. More importantly, members learned to organize themselves.

AGUA enabled the El Zúngano Watershed Organization to carry out a study to identify and prioritize the community's most critical water problems and proposed appropriate solutions. A five year integrated watershed management plan was developed through the local municipality to address the future of clean water for all Zúngano residents.

**More than 1,000 residents now have a direct household connection to clean, sustainable water – an achievement made possible by leveraging skills acquired through USAID.**

Through USAID's program, residents learned to leverage assistance by organizing themselves around the area where most of their natural resources originate - the watershed. A key factor for success of the El Zúngano Watershed Organization is that it acts as a representative body. Problems are identified and solved at the grassroots level. Organization members have found the means to improve their lives by pooling resources and skills to resolve local issues.

Success Story