
El Salvador: Integrated Solid Waste Management Project Protects Human and Ecosystem Health

Operating Unit: USAID/El Salvador

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Keywords: El Salvador; solid waste management.

Related Strategic Objective:

SO 3: Sustainable improvements in the health of women and children achieved.

The Mayor of Usulután together with the Mayors of three nearby towns are working together to solve a complex and persistent problem of how to manage community solid waste. The result of this collaborative effort will be the first modern solid waste treatment facility in El Salvador, dramatically improving the lives of more than 56,000 local residents.

Nationally, barely a third of urban residents have access to garbage collection, while the rest toss their garbage along the roadsides, in clandestine dumps, or into nearby rivers. This practice has polluted the surrounding ecosystems—both terrestrial and aquatic—and caused the spread of diseases such as diarrhea and skin infections.

In March 1998, in an effort to assist in the development of alternative solutions to existing solid waste disposal practices, a team composed of representatives of the Central American Environmental Project, USAID, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency selected Usulután as the site to develop a sanitary landfill. Six months later, these agencies signed a cooperative agreement with the affected municipalities and a U.S. non-governmental organization. The agreement defined the commitments of each organization to assure the establishment of a solid waste management enterprise.

USAID/El Salvador collaborated in this joint venture by providing funds for the design and development of the facility as well as technical assistance through its institutional contractors. USAID also channeled funds through the Government of El Salvador Social Investment Fund for Local Development for the construction of the landfill and purchase of equipment.

The mayor of Usulután did his part by negotiating the purchase of land for the solid waste treatment site, an area of 103 acres that cost over \$120,000. This land was purchased and then donated by the municipality as a counterpart contribution to the project. The approval of the environmental impact assessment by the Ministry of the Environment in 1999 concluded the last hurdle to finalizing this unique initiative.

Residents will benefit from this project in a variety of ways including: a substantial improvement in the quality of their lives due to the cleaner environment; the creation of new job opportunities related to the construction and management of the new sanitary landfill; the income from recycling; the related reduction in skin infections and other airborne diseases; and the security of having a long-term solution to their solid waste management problems.

The mayor of Usulután summarized the struggles of the past four years by saying, "Thanks to the participation of all these concerned organizations, the residents of our communities

now have an opportunity for a better quality of life. We are solving a serious pollution problem that has been with us for as long as we can remember”.