



Advisory Services in the SAHTOSO Methodology: Total and Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene

In 2016, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) established a consortium aimed at laying the foundations for a comprehensive intervention that would contribute to the reduction of the incidence of diarrhea in children under five years of age through the improvement of the conditions of water services, sanitation and hygiene in the departments of Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Sololá, Quiché, Alta Verapaz and Chiquimula, giving rise to the Sustainable Total Sanitation and Hygiene (SAHTOSO) methodology and focused on the elimination of human fecal contamination in the environment by covering the systematic use and maintenance of toilets, wastewater management and the proper handling of disposable diapers, among other practices that ensure the hygienic separation of feces from human contact.

Its implementation has been officially recognized by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance (MSPAS) through Ministerial Agreement No. 13-2022, which establishes that SAHTOSO is a valid and recommended methodology for sanitation and hygiene interventions in rural areas of the country. This approval reinforces its use as a key tool to advance towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 6.

By the end of 2024, **1,379 certified communities** in the municipalities covered by the coverage have been certified, and 8 municipalities with the Status Free of Environmental Fecal Contamination (ECOFAM) and **583,033 people have benefited**.

SAHTOSO is a comprehensive intervention methodology that seeks total sanitation coverage in a community and has as its main characteristics, the change of behaviors in the face of the situation of sanitation and fecal contamination that the communities themselves identify and take action, promotes community leadership and collective action, based on emotions of pride, dignity and well-being, stimulating the willingness to change social norms, habits and hygiene practices (hand washing and safe water consumption).

The methodology focuses on the self-construction, use and maintenance of toilets by families, the practice of washing hands with soap and water or ashes, the management of safe water at home and the management of disposable diapers. Thanks to its zero-subsidy approach, SAHTOSO offers good sanitation at a lower cost per family, a higher ratio of communities adopting correct behaviors, and a higher sustainability rate. Currently, there is an average of \$30.00 for a family to exit Open Defecation, which represents a climb up the ladder of sanitation for families. 90% of activated communities achieve total sanitation and elimination of fecal contamination in an average of 3 to 4 months.

Currently, SAHTOSO has been transferred to other Latin American countries, consolidating itself as a reference methodology for sustainable rural sanitation, applicable both in regular programs and in emergency contexts.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ADVISORY SERVICE: SAHTOSO METHODOLOGY

General Objective



Provide specialized technical assistance for the transfer, adaptation and implementation of SAHTOSO to UNICEF team, implementing partners and other stakeholders to initiate this approach in the context of emergency response and/or in a regular development programme.

Specific Objectives

- Advise, train and accompany the UNICEF team and implementing partners and other stakeholders in the implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology in rural communities, ensuring its correct adaptation to the local context.
- Train facilitators and supervisors in the SAHTOSO methodology, as well as key personnel in the WASH sector, to ensure the proper implementation and sustainability of the approach. This includes establishing monitoring mechanisms and promoting replicability.
- Develop a technical support plan, including face-to-face and virtual assistance during the first 6 months of implementation, providing tools such as Kobo Collect for monitoring and evaluating progress.
- Socialize the benefits and impacts of the SAHTOSO methodology with government institutions and actors in the WASH sector, fostering interest in adopting and replicating the approach in other communities and regions.

- ✓ **Methodology approved by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance (MSPAS)** of Guatemala through Ministerial Agreement 13-2022.
- 🚫 **Zero subsidies:** focus on self-construction and long-term sustainability.
- 💰 **Average cost per family: USD 30** to leave open defecation and promote the adoption of hygienic habits.
- 📈 **90% sustainability** one year after community certification.
- 🕒 **Fast results:** certification of communities in 3 to 5 months.
- 🌐 **High replicability:** implemented in Guatemala, Colombia, Nicaragua, Peru and Bolivia.
- 👥 **Strengthens local capacities:** trains facilitators, local governments and community committees.
- 🇬🇹 **It includes a monitoring and verification system (ECOFAM)** validated by the State.
- 📖 **Guaranteed contextual adaptation:** culturally relevant and flexible approach.
- 🔄 **Scalable and efficient:** ideal for national programs or emergency interventions.

OUR ADVISORY SERVICES

The following services are included in the Consultancies for the Implementation of the SAHTOSO Methodology:

1. **Planning:** For the planning of the workshop and field mission, virtual sessions are organized to present and validate the workshop agenda, define the profile of the participants and ensure the necessary materials. The date and times necessary for the field visits are also agreed. The receiving organization or institution is responsible for making arrangements with the communities for the field practices, during the workshop and the week after the field consulting, in addition to other logistical support such as the room, food, materials, etc.



2. Development of the training workshop

Day 1 and 2: Expectations, experience of Guatemala and the stages with its steps: To achieve the linkage of the methodology, it is necessary to have general information on sanitation, hygiene and health conditions in contrast to the geographical, economic and social conditions of the area of intervention.

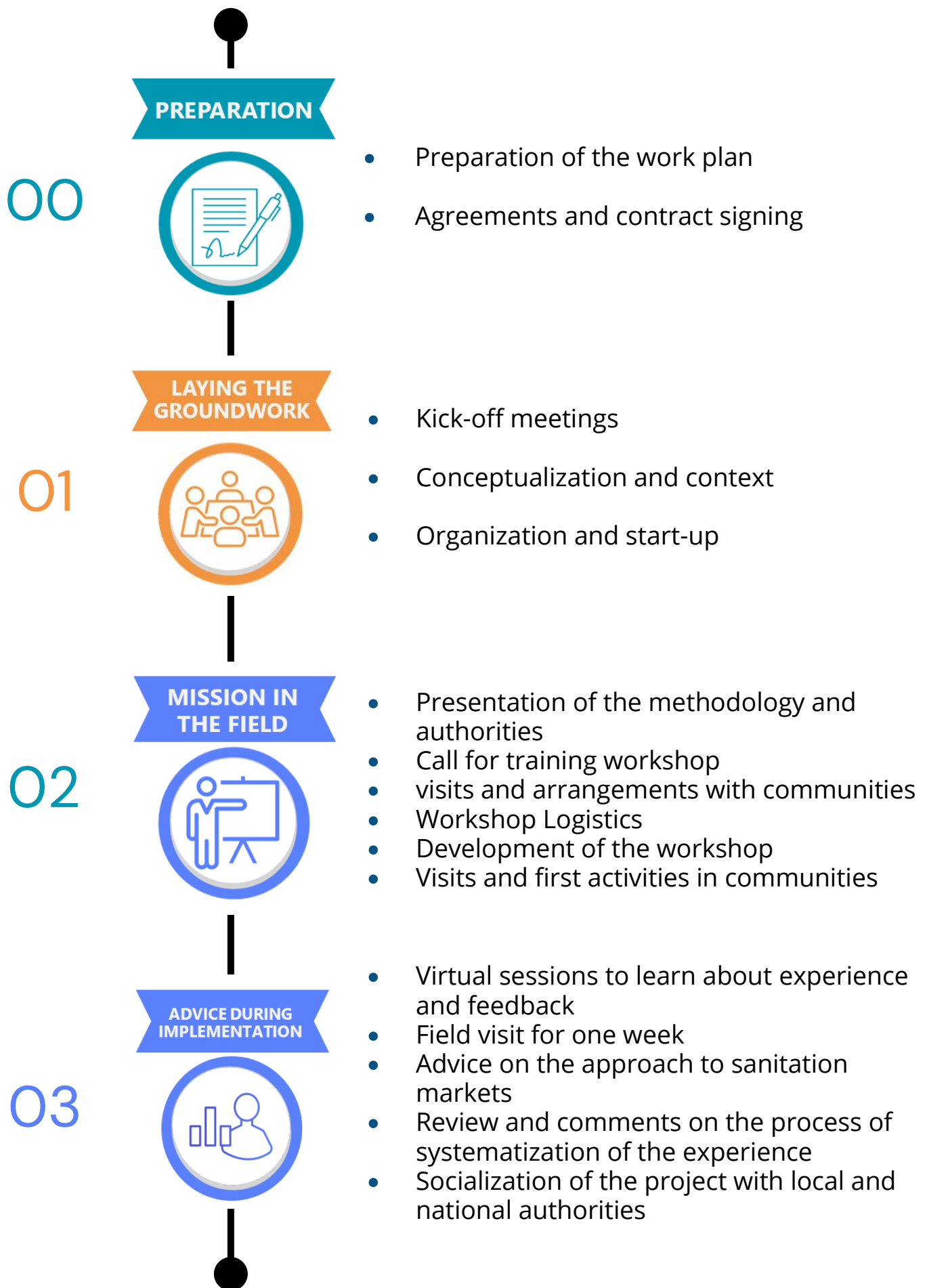
Day 3: Field practice and feedback: During the workshop, field practices are carried out in the selected communities and offices of the host organization or institution. After the internship in the communities, the SAHTOSO advisory team carries out the feedback process where the positive and negative aspects are considered. In addition, observations are provided to take into account during Triggering, post-Triggering, monitoring, sustainability.

Day 4: General observations of the post-Triggering stage: According to the area of intervention, some adaptations that were manifested during the development of the workshop should be considered.

Day 5: Post Triggering. Monitoring. Sustainability: To carry out a record of the process and scope of the implementation of SAHTOSO, the following minimum indicators for SAHTOSO must be considered, listing here those that are considered to be the main ones and that are included in the SAHTOSO monitoring system of Guatemala.

3. **Recommendations and steps to follow:** Finally, the SAHTOSO advisory team provided recommendations and steps to follow to improve the implementation of SAHTOSO Methodology in already established communities.

PHASES OF CONSULTANCY: SAHTOSO METHODOLOGY



OUR EXPERIENCE IN CONSULTING IN SAHTOSO METHODOLOGY



Advice on the implementation in Colombia of the "Sustainable Total Sanitation and Hygiene" Methodology (SAHTOSO) in rural communities of La Guajira, Colombia.

From February 14 to November 31, 2022

Based on Helvetas' experience, advice is provided to the UNICEF and Halú Foundation team for the transfer and implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology, which includes a strong reflection process that considers contextual adaptation in the territory of La Guajira, understanding and respecting the social, cultural and other characteristics of the communities and needs/priorities for intervention. The rural communities of La Guajira have higher rates of open defecation, specifically in the communities prioritized by the UNICEF demonstration project, where they are more dispersed. These communities belong to the Wayuú indigenous culture, which maintains its customs and traditions over time, as well as the native language.

General objective

Transfer of Helvetas Guatemala's experience in implementing SAHTOSO to UNICEF team, implementing partners and other stakeholders to initiate this approach in the context of emergency response and/or regular development programme.

Specific objectives

- Train selected facilitators and supervisors in the SAHTOSO methodology to assume its implementation. Also, key personnel of the local institutional, seeking follow-up agreements and potential response.
- Provide advice and on-the-ground support to the UNICEF and Halú Foundation team to implement the SAHTOSO methodology.
- Socialize benefits and impacts of the SAHTOSO approach with local institutions, to awaken interest and potential adoption.



Panerrakat Community Triggering Practices.



Panerrakat Community with UNICEF and Halu Foundation teams.

From the training workshop for the transfer of methodology (March 2022), the need for its adaptation to the local context was exposed, mentioning that the tools are flexible, but more strongly the sociocultural and economic relevance, it was also stated that the essence of the methodology lies in its principles so it should be maintained or reinforced.

During the second field visit (October 18 to 21, 20229), the analysis was carried out in conjunction with the Halu Foundation team, to identify the main adaptations made to date.

Main learnings during the consultancy in Colombia:

- The local team (Halü Foundation), with support from HELVETAS and UNICEF, carried out a critical review of the steps and tools, adapting colors of the community sketch, didactic materials, Triggering formats and participation strategies according to the Wayuu worldview. These adaptations did not alter the structure and principles of SAHTOSO, but they did strengthen its local appropriation.
- An emblematic case was that of Fermín, a father who self-built the first toilet and became a reference for other communities, promoting not only technology, but also the principles of dignity and family care. This spontaneous leadership was leveraged as a replicable model to strengthen the scalability of the process.
- The promoter model was validated as an effective strategy for follow-up, monitoring and post-ECOFAM certification.
- The team proposed strategies for post-certification monitoring, strengthening community norms, and building capacity among facilitators and local authorities. This includes the design of re-certification mechanisms, evaluation of the sustainability of ECOFAM status, and connection with national policies such as the Rural Aqueduct Law.
- The implementation made it possible to identify that conflicts between Wayuu clans and the internal dynamics of indigenous governance can become both barriers and opportunities. The key is to design a context-sensitive Pre-Triggering stage, which allows you to build trust and legitimacy from the beginning.



During the development of step 6 of the SAHTOSO methodology in the Asainapo community.



Experience of Leivis Uriana from the community of Panerrakat II, currently a promoter of her community to motivate the rest of the families to self-build. He mentions that he will make it available to the UCA (Community Care Unit) the toilet for use.



Another family in Panerrakat II, who are almost finishing the construction of its toilet with brick, mud and Yotojoro. They mention that they are very motivated to start using it.



Advice on the implementation in Nicaragua of the "Sustainable Total Sanitation and Hygiene" Methodology (SAHTOSO) for the personnel involved in MINSA, UNICEF and the formation of a team of facilitators with knowledge of the Bocay River area; in the municipal seat of San José de Bocay, Jinotega.

From June 20 to October 21, 2022

Based on Helvetas' experience, advice is provided on the methodological process that includes reflections on contextual adaptation in the Alto Wangky territory, in San José de Bocay, understanding and respecting the social, cultural and other characteristics of the communities and needs/priorities for intervention.



Participants in the SAHTOSO workshop in San José Bocay.

General objective

Transfer of Helvetas Guatemala's experience in the implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology to the UNICEF team, MINSA and other stakeholders to initiate this approach in the context of emergency response and/or in a regular development program.

Specific objectives

- Provide advice, training and accompaniment to the UNICEF and MINSA team to implement the SAHTOSO methodology for the first time, in an emergency response or development context.
- Support UNICEF and MINSA in the selection of facilitators and supervisors of the SAHTOSO approach.
- Train selected facilitators and supervisors in the SAHTOSO methodology to assume its implementation. Also, key personnel from the government WASH sector, seeking follow-up agreements and potential replication.
- Provide advice and an accompaniment plan to people who facilitate the methodology during the period of 6 months from its start in person and virtually. The accompanying plan will include presentation and training to a monitoring tool using Kobo Collect.
- Socialize benefits and impacts of addressing the WASH approach with government WASH sector institutions, to spark interest and potential adoption.

Los temas generales abordados se presentan en la siguiente gráfica:



Graphic: Development of the SAHTOSO transfer workshop

As of July 2022, HELVETAS began a process of accompaniment to the Ministry of Health (MINSA) in the implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology, within the framework of collaboration with UNICEF as an articulating entity and source of financing. The intervention focused on five pilot communities in the area with Mayagna population, located on the banks of the Bocay River, in a context of difficult access and high health vulnerability of the population.

To operationalize the experience in Nicaragua, it was necessary to provide advice on the ground during the period from October 03 to 09, 2022, where a series of actions have been necessary, ranging from training the MINSA team, facilitators and members of the verification committee in a week of workshop where all the steps involved in SAHTOSO were known.

Subsequently, a week of feedback was held with the team of selected facilitators to guarantee the actions in the field, it has also been necessary to hold virtual meetings to learn about the monitoring and reinforcement system for the different steps that the methodology requires. In the first week, she carried out field accompaniment to learn about progress and to be able to verify the situation of the communities by the verification committee. A workshop was held to learn about the aspects that have facilitated and situations that have hindered actions in the communities. This workshop also served so that the Director of the National Water Authority could learn about the methodology.

Main learnings during counseling in Nicaragua:

- The active involvement of SILAIS (Jinotega) and MINSA community staff allowed for real ownership of the process, which facilitated effective implementation and ensured that the communities were certified as ECOFAM.
- The implementation in Mayagna indigenous communities evidenced the need to adapt content and dynamics, considering cultural values and language barriers. The identification of cultural motivators (pride, autonomy, identity) must be a central part of the implementation.
- The high participation of women (53% in the committees) not only provided commitment and continuity but also reinforced the equity approach.
- The articulation between MINSA, MARENA, FISE and ANA strengthened the verification processes and gave legitimacy to the certifications. This experience shows that scaling up SAHTOSO requires cross-sectoral coordination structures from the local level.
- It was recommended to avoid the use of plastics and polluting materials during the celebrations, integrating principles of ecological coherence in the final stage of the process.



Visit to homes in accompaniment of the Municipal Verification Committee.



Level of participation of men, women and children in Triggering



SAHTOSO Monitoring Committee, Amak community



Advice to start the application of the "Sustainable Total Sanitation and Hygiene" Methodology (SAHTOSO) in the districts of the Province of Coronel Portillo, Ucayali Region; Peru.

From May 23, 2024 to February 04, 2025.

Implementation experience in other contexts has shown that a community's certification can be achieved in an average of five months, achieving 90% sustainability one year later. In the case of Peru, it is expected that, with HELVETAS' technical assistance, the learning curve will be faster and more efficient, allowing local teams to replicate the approach in other communities with an average time similar to that of Guatemala.

As part of the implementation strategy, a five-day face-to-face workshop was held in Pucallpa, with the participation of UNICEF staff, Peru's Regional Directorate of Housing, Construction and Sanitation (DRVCS), and local facilitators. This workshop was the starting point to form a team of local facilitators trained in the necessary competencies for the implementation of SAHTOSO.



Participants in the SAHTOSO workshop in San José Bocay.

General objective

Transfer and adapt HELVETAS Guatemala's experience in the implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology, to strengthen the capacities of the UNICEF team, the Regional Directorate of Construction, Housing and Sanitation (DRVCS) of Peru, and other key actors, in order to initiate its application in the districts of the Province of Coronel Portillo, Ucayali Region.

Specific objectives

- Advise, train and accompany the UNICEF and DRVCS team in the implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology in rural communities, ensuring its correct adaptation to the local context.
- Train facilitators and supervisors in the SAHTOSO methodology, as well as key personnel in the WASH sector, to ensure the proper implementation and sustainability of the approach. This includes establishing monitoring mechanisms and promoting replicability.
- Develop a technical support plan, including face-to-face and virtual assistance during the first 6 months of implementation, providing tools such as Kobo Collect for monitoring and evaluating progress.
- Socialize the benefits and impacts of the SAHTOSO methodology with government institutions and actors in the WASH sector, fostering interest in adopting and replicating the approach in other communities and regions.



Step 3 Practices, Triggering



Triggering in community Nuevo Egypt, Yarinacocha

Main learnings during the consultancy in Peru:

- The Regional Directorate of Housing, Construction and Sanitation (DRVCS) assumed a leading role from the beginning, integrating SAHTOSO into its operational planning and assigning focal technicians committed to the process.
- A monitoring dashboard in Power BI was used, which made it possible to visualize the progress of each community and strengthen data-driven decision-making.
- The combination of virtual sessions (more than 15) and face-to-face visits was key to technically accompanying the local team without interrupting the implementation.
- During the final stage, it was proposed to include new topics: gray water management, safe feeding, and alternatives for diaper disposal.
- It was suggested to complement future phases with market technological options, as part of a sanitation ladder adapted to the Amazonian context.

Advice for the Transfer of the "Sustainable Total Sanitation and Hygiene" Methodology (SAHTOSO) in Bolivia.

From April 28 to November 30, 2025.



Within the framework of UNICEF and HELVETAS Bolivia's commitment to improve access to sanitation in rural communities, the decision was made to implement the Sustainable Total Sanitation and Hygiene (SAHTOSO) methodology in the country, adapting the approach previously developed in Guatemala. To this end, HELVETAS Guatemala and HELVETAS Bolivia, with the aim of providing technical advice to the Caritas team (the community facilitators responsible for implementation), coordinated a training workshop and a week of feedback with field visits. The purpose of this workshop was to present the SAHTOSO methodology, train and identify the ideal equipment for its application in the field.

For the development of this first phase, first in Guatemala, there was the presence of a Bolivian Mission with the participation of representatives of UNICEF, HELVETAS and Municipal Mayors' Offices where they were able to learn first-hand about the experience of SAHTOSO in rural communities, a situation that led to the decision to start the process in Bolivia. Subsequently, there were meetings between representatives of HELVETAS (Bolivia and Guatemala) where it was determined that a training workshop was important. Subsequently, HELVETAS Bolivia coordinated all the logistics to be able to develop a workshop, where it invited personnel from UNICEF, Caritas and HELVETAS to participate in the entire week of workshop and field visit. In this way, the first actions that lead us to complete the first phase of the workshop and field visits were carried out.

General objective

Transfer and adapt HELVETAS Guatemala's experience in the implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology, to strengthen the capacities of the UNICEF, HELVETAS and Caritas Bolivia team, in order to start its application in the municipality of Puerto de Acosta, department of La Paz.

Specific objectives

1. Advise, train and accompany the team of facilitators in the implementation of the SAHTOSO methodology in rural communities, ensuring its correct adaptation to the local context.
2. Train facilitators and supervisors in the SAHTOSO methodology, to ensure the proper implementation and sustainability of the approach. This includes establishing monitoring mechanisms and promoting replicability.
3. Develop a technical support plan, including face-to-face and virtual assistance during the first 6 months of implementation, providing tools such as Kobo Collect for monitoring and evaluating progress.



Participants during the development of the SAHTOSO workshop.

Main learnings during the consultancy in Bolivia (in process):

- The initial workshop, together with the feedback week, allowed 11 people to be trained and a team of four facilitators with appropriate skills and high motivation to be selected. This phase was key to ensuring a solid base of local implementation.
- Efforts have been made to contextualize the tools with respect to language, respecting the worldview and social dynamics of the communities of the Bolivian highlands.
- It is recognized that, as a pilot, it is essential to document good practices and adjust the approach according to local challenges. Continuous monitoring and remote and face-to-face technical support by HELVETAS Guatemala are considered essential.
- From the initial phase, the importance of ensuring women's active participation in community committees and implementation was discussed as part of a more inclusive and representative approach.



Dramatization on Triggering (step 3 SAHTOSO)



SAHTOSO Monitoring Committee, Amak community

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE TRANSFER PROCESS

The experience accumulated in Guatemala, together with advisory processes in other Latin American countries, has generated valuable lessons about the factors that favor or limit the success of the SAHTOSO methodology. These lessons provide a deeper understanding of what conditions need to be ensured to achieve effective and sustainable implementation. Incorporating them from the beginning enhances the impact, replicability and efficiency of the intervention.



Continuous Technical Accompaniment: HELVETAS will continue to provide technical assistance virtually and in person during the coming months, with the aim of reinforcing the knowledge of the SAHTOSO team in the country receiving advice and ensuring a successful implementation. It is recommended to hold monthly follow-up sessions with local teams, where progress is discussed and any difficulties that may arise are resolved.



Gender Approach: It must be guaranteed that the gender approach is transversal in all the activities of the SAHTOSO methodology. This implies creating conditions that promote equality of access, participation and decision-making between men and women. In particular, the importance of involving women in key positions within SAHTOSO committees should be emphasised, as a way of ensuring that the perspectives of all people in the community are considered in the implementation process.



Horizontal and Permanent Feedback: The facilitation team must be in a constant process of feedback on the implementation of the SAHTOSO, this will allow the identification of challenges and lessons learned. This feedback process should be continuous, ensuring that challenges encountered on the ground are discussed and resolved together. In addition, prior to the start of field actions, they should take at least three days to practice the SAHTOSO steps.



Facilitators as Key Actors of the Methodology: Facilitators are the heart of the SAHTOSO methodology. It is crucial to continue strengthening their capacities through ongoing training on key topics such as hygiene, sanitation, sanitation marketing techniques, and community leadership. It is recommended to establish a schedule of periodic trainings that allows facilitators to continuously improve their skills and adapt to challenges that arise in the field.

Motivate and strengthen the capacities of facilitators to maintain quality in the implementation of SAHTOSO through training processes on hygiene and sanitation issues, menstrual hygiene, sanitation marketing, among other topics that strengthen capacities.



Community Ownership through Emotions: The methodology promotes behavior change by activating emotions such as disgust, shame, dignity, and pride. This emotional strategy has proven to be more effective than traditional information campaigns.



School and Community Sanitation: In the communities where SAHTOSO is implemented, the construction of sanitary models in schools should be considered, which serve as an example for the community. These models must be built with the active participation of the community and under the principle of self-construction, strengthening the sense of ownership and sustainability.



Documentation of Good Practices and Lessons Learned: During the implementation process, it is essential to document good practices and lessons learned. These should be shared both locally and nationally, to encourage replication and continuously improve the SAHTOSO methodology.

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE TRANSFER PROCESS

Integration of New Hygiene Components: SAHTOSO focuses on eliminating all routes of fecal-oral transmission. Throughout the process, it is important to consider the inclusion of new hygiene components, such as:

- Practices for the proper storage and handling of food.
- Safe disposal of disposable diapers.
- Proper management of wastewater in homes. These complementary practices will help ensure a healthy environment and consolidate the gains made in terms of sanitation.



Development and Validation of the ECOFAM Verification and Certification Protocol: A specific protocol must be prepared for the verification and certification of communities under ECOFAM status, which must be validated by the institutions involved. This protocol should include:

- Criteria for certification: Detailed list of key indicators to be achieved by communities.
- Verification process: Methodology for conducting field visits, evaluating the community's achievements, and confirming its faecal contamination-free status.
- Responsibilities: Define who are the actors in charge of carrying out the verification (Municipal Verification Committee, local authorities, among others).



Strengthening of the Municipal Verification Committee: It is essential to integrate the Municipal Verification Committee into the monitoring and certification activities of the communities. This committee should be composed of representatives from local government, WASH institutions and other key organisations in the area of intervention. Their role is crucial to ensure the transparency and validity of the certification process.



Adaptation of the Implementation Process: During the first months of implementation, it is likely that adaptations of the materials and the approach will be made in the field, according to the particularities of each community. These adaptations should be carefully documented to be evaluated and used in future interventions. Flexibility is key to ensure that the SAHTOSO approach responds to local realities and achieves the stated objectives, but without neglecting principles.



Documentation of Difficulties and Proposed Solutions: A regular space should be established to document the main difficulties encountered in the process and the solutions implemented. This information will be important for the design of future interventions and for the continuous improvement of the SAHTOSO methodology. It is recommended that this documentation process be led by a monitoring and evaluation team, with the support of the SAHTOSO Committee.



Escalamiento de SAHTOSO en Nuevas Comunidades: Una vez que las comunidades piloto logren el estatus de ECOFAM, se deben realizar esfuerzos para escalar la metodología a otras comunidades. Para ello, se sugiere organizar sesiones de intercambio de experiencias entre las comunidades certificadas y las comunidades que están por iniciar el proceso de SAHTOSO, lo que facilitará la transferencia de conocimiento y motivará la adopción de buenas prácticas.



Advisory Services - SAHTOSO Methodology: Total and Sustainable Sanitation and Hygiene



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