

# **Successful**

## **Experiences in Municipal Public Water and Sanitation Services from Brazil**

### **ASSEMAE**

National Association of Municipal Water and Sanitation  
Services



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# Foreword

This edited collection, “Successful Experiences in Municipal Public Water and Sanitation Services” by the National Association of Municipal Water and Sanitation Services (ASSEMAE) is a tribute to the approximately 1,700 Brazilian municipalities that autonomously administrate these essential services.

In the 1970s, many municipalities especially those in metropolitan regions, gave up the administration of water and sanitation services. By claiming a lack of resources, these municipalities conceded water and sewage delivery to state sanitation companies. They therefore adhered to the centralism of the national basic sanitation plan (PLANSA), the official policy of the military government that took power in 1971.

ASSEMAE was born out of the resistance against this policy of undermining local administration. It was formed in order to prove the capacity of municipalities to outline their own destinies, integrating sanitation with local policies. The organisation is composed of courageous municipalities that plan and implement water and sanitation services as a powerful tool for social inclusion.

Today ASSEMAE’s paradigm is social participation, the opening up of public services to citizen control. That is why this publication intends to be a landmark in reflecting on the importance of water and sanitation services for the life of our municipalities.

The multiplicity of experiences presented, demonstrates the varied nuances in sanitation delivery and celebrates the necessity to intensify cooperation and alliances between municipalities. There are municipalities with rich experiences not incorporated in this publication. However, their enormous contribution to the structuring of the Brazilian sanitation service cannot be denied.

Our objective is that public administration, social actors, public institutions and civil society, can debate and benefit from these experiences by exchanging collective working methods. This publication is ASSEMAE’s tribute to all the anonymous workers that shape the history of public water and sanitation services in their municipalities, all of which are represented by the engineer Jair Bernardes da Silva. Furthermore, with this publication we would like to devote this document to our leader Rodolfo Jose da Costa e Silva.

Silvano Silvério da Costa  
National President of ASSEMAE

## DEFINITIONS

The following expressions used in the Brazilian water sector may not be understood by everybody, so we have added some simple definitions in order to prevent misunderstandings

**Environmental sanitation** (as defined by SAAE, Alagoinhas): the set of actions aimed at improving a healthy environment, through drinking water supply, waste water collection, treatment and sanitation systems for liquid, solid and gaseous residues, control and prevention of excessive noise, urban drainage systems for rain water, promotion of public education concerning land use, control of disease transmission, and other specialised services and works.

**Social control** is understood as the mechanism and process to guarantee society access to information, technical representation and participation in the whole range of decision-making processes around public services. It is understood as the participation of society in formulation and implementation of policies. Planning, regulation, and inspection, evaluation and services delivery should be under social control.

# Introduction

## ***Society shows its strength and implements various successful management experiences throughout the country***

The challenges related to environmental sanitation in Brazil involve various issues, from the low level of service coverage and quality, to the lack of a legislative-institutional framework as well as the low level of public investments. The need for environmental sanitation can be seen throughout the nation, even though the major deficits are especially found in the north and northeast regions, in small localities, in the rural areas and the periphery of big cities.

However, while Brazilian society has been debating the terms of a national environmental sanitation policy for almost two decades without yet reaching a consensus, society has shown its strength by carrying out various successful projects throughout the country. These experiences have shown the ability of public authorities to meet challenges in a creative and democratic way.

These experiences have been fundamental not only to demonstrate the strength of the beneficiaries of the services in taking the issue into their own hands, but also as a process for constructing the principles of a public environmental sanitation policy in the country. These are experiences that are recognised as successful not only by the population benefiting from them, but also by national and international institutions such as the United Nations, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation and the World Wildlife Fund, which have recognised these experiences. They are, at the end of the day, a demonstration of the ability to “swim against the tide” and strengthen local authorities, especially since in the 1970s, the country adopted a model which was both centralised and distant from the population, the users of the services.

Because of the need to collect and disseminate these experiences, ASSEMAE decided to produce this publication. Here, twenty municipal experiences of sanitation service which are considered successful are presented.

ASSEMAE and the organisers of this publication are aware that the experiences presented here are not necessarily the best municipal cases. They are at most, part of the best cases. We are aware of the existence of various other successful municipal experiences throughout the country, some with little visibility and limited dissemination, others which are almost anonymous, that form a network of practical commitment to the notion of the public good and the interests of society. However, the publication had to adopt a method to select particular cases. We hope the examples will be considered merely representatives of a much bigger set of municipalities that deserve to have their cases described and widely disseminated.

The twenty successful cases were selected based on a combination of population size and regional diversity and, especially, the satisfactory fulfilment of part or all of the principles of a public environmental sanitation policy. These principles were democratically constructed during the last two decades, as the result of the intense debate based on the public quality and critical nature of sanitation for the promotion of public health and the protection of the quality of service.

These principles are:

1. **Universality** - universal provision of sanitation to the target population;
2. **Equity** - equality in the quality of services, regardless of the socio-economic conditions of the user and the urban reality where he/she lives;
3. **Integrity** - provision of sanitation services with an integral vision that considers sanitation as a set of actions, involving at least, water supply, sanitary sewerage, public hygiene, and rainwater drainage;
4. **Municipal responsibility** - recognition of and respect for municipal autonomy, in line with the constitutional requirements;
5. **Public management** - the understanding that sanitation services are public by definition, provided by an entity public in nature, organised as a direct administrative body, autonomous government agency, public company, or joint stock association. In the latter case, the decision-making process must rest in the hands of those responsible for the service;
6. **Participation and social control** - as an indispensable prerequisite to guarantee the transparency and legitimacy of diverse interests as well as the accessibility of sanitation services and infrastructure by the population;
7. **Cross-sectoral** - integration of planning and action associated with urban development, public health, and environmental and water resources. This is indispensable for the success of policies and actions, which are complex by nature;
8. **Service quality** - includes regularity, continuity, efficiency, safety, reliability, courtesy and moderation of costs;
9. **Access** - tariff policy should be compatible with the users' purchasing power according to the practice of price moderation.

The selection of the experiences presented involved the consultation of a group of specialists of renowned leadership and technical and scientific capacity. To meet the conditions of the consultation technique chosen, twelve specialists were invited to participate in the process. Two consultation rounds took place. The first consisted of the indication by the specialists of ten to twenty experiences which best satisfied the principles of an environmental sanitation public policy. Eighty-four municipalities with successful sanitation service supply experiences were identified. Around 61% of the selected municipalities were from the southeast region, of which 25% were from the state of Minas Gerais and 27% from the state of Sao Paulo. Around 26% were from the south region, 11% from the state of Parana and 11% from the state of Santa Catarina. The second consultation round involved the participation of seven specialists from the initial group. The preferences put forth by the specialists were thoroughly analysed. In order to assist in the selection process, data from the National Information System on Sanitation (SNIS) 2003 and the Demographic Census of IBGE of 2000, were used. For detailed descriptions of the twenty selected cases, a complex process was followed, field research was undertaken, interviews were conducted with technicians and administrators, and secondary information collected from existing databases. The texts went through various versions and revisions with the participation of the professionals listed in this publication.

Municipalities from different regions were selected, ranging in size from 21,000 to 1.42 million inhabitants. Sixteen municipalities were from the southeast region, three municipalities from the south region and one from the northeast region. It is important to note that, apart from the municipalities included in the publication, the following municipalities were also mentioned by the specialists: Antonina (PR), Americana (SP), Amparo (SP), Atibaia (SP), Bandeirantes (PR), Barra Mansa (RJ), Belo Horizonte (MG),Boa Viagem (CE),Caeté (MG), Campos Novos (SC), Catalão (GO), Colatina (ES), Governador Valadares (MG), Guaçuí (ES), Guanhães (MG), Guaratinguetá (SP), Herval D'Oeste (SC), Iguatu (CE), Indaiatuba (SP), Ipatinga (MG), Itabira (MG), Itabuna (BA), Itapira (SP), Itapiranga (SC), Itaúna (MG), Itu (SP), Jaguapitã (PR), Jaguaraiava (PR), Jaraguá do Sul (SC), Jataizinho (PR), Jerônimo Monteiro (ES), Joaçaba (SC), Juazeiro (BA), Juiz de Fora (MG), Jundiá (SP), Jussara (PR), Lobato (PR), Luzerna (SC), Marechal Cândido Rondon (PR), Mantena (MG), Mogi Guaçu (SP), Muaná (PA), Muriaé (MG), Orleans (SC), Ouro Preto (MG), Piumhi (MG), Pradópolis (SP), Recife (PE), Reduto (MG), Resende (RJ), Ribeirão Claro (PR), Rio Claro (SP), Rio Negrinho (SC), São Bento do Sul (SC), São Caetano do Sul (SP), São João do Jaguaribe (CE), São Leopoldo (RS), São Ludgero (SC), Serra Negra (RN), Sete Lagoas (MG), Sobral (CE), Sorocaba (SP), Três Rios (RJ), Valinhos (SP), Vera Cruz (RS) and Votuporonga (SP).

It is expected that this effort of dissemination to the Brazilian, and even international, society to administrators and relevant authorities, can serve as an example of, and inspiration for, good practice to be followed in the quest for a citizen-oriented and universal service to the population. Apart from that, it is expected that the ability of the municipalities to rewrite the history of sanitation in Brazil and the feasibility of public involvement in this sector can be well demonstrated.

With this publication, ASSEMAE intends to contribute to the process of formulation of a public sanitation policy, which meets the principles of a fair and democratic society for Brazil, as well as demonstrating that the municipal public water and sanitation services can initiate a public-public partnership process in the country, seeking to universalise the aforementioned

principles and contribute so that the specific Millennium Development Goals set by the UN can be achieved.

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