Summary

One of the most important achievements of the rural drinking water sector in Nicaragua is the very significant increase in rural coverage in the past 20 years, from 10% in 1980 to 46% in 2002. Compared with other developing countries, this growth in coverage has been spectacular. The future projections are also ambitious, contemplating a further growth of rural water and sewage coverage reaching 56% in 2007, according to the Enhanced Strategy of Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction (ERCERP).

These successes also raise new challenges for Nicaragua’s rural sub-sector. Alongside the increased coverage, conservation, maintenance and good use of the growing number of rural water and sewage systems already constructed are increasingly important strategic concerns.

This document is the final report of the mid-term evaluation of the decentralization of the Operation and Maintenance Unit (UNOM) of the Nicaraguan Aqueducts and Sanitary Sewage Systems Enterprise’s Rural Aqueducts Management (ENACAL-GAR) in Territory VI (Matagalpa/Jinotega) and the intervention zone of the Project of Water and Sanitation and Community Organization (PASOC). The general objective of this investigation was to contribute to the formulation of strategies for achieving a sustainable and effective system of administration, operation and maintenance of the potable water works constructed in Nicaragua’s rural areas.

The research is focused on the functioning of UNOM. UNOM’s objective is “to achieve good use and correct maintenance for the sustainability of the systems implemented by different programs working in the territory over the long term.” UNOM is trying to achieve this objective through the work of its promoters, who provide technical assistance to the communities and their Potable Water and Sewage Committees (CAPS) where Water and Sewage projects have been implemented.
In the geographic area of the research, (some) UNOM functions are being decentralized. One of the most important motives of the decentralization is the expectation of transferring faculties and responsibilities to municipal governments, as the entities closest to the population, capable of administering local resources, articulating social demand with the supply of state services, bringing public administration closer to the citizenry and promoting civic participation in making public administration transparent, efficient and rational.

For ENACAL-GAR, however, there was another more pragmatic motive. With an increasing number of potable water works, and no increase in the number of promoters in the Regional UNOM of ENACAL-GAR, there was a shortfall of personnel and inputs. The expectation is that the municipal governments can solve this problem by contracting municipal UNOM promoters.

During the evaluation, 71 CAPS have been interviewed in 15 municipalities to pull together the opinion and perception of their members regarding their water systems, their demands and the support received through UNOM.

Municipal UNOM promoters directly attended forty-four of these CAPS in nine municipalities, receiving technical support and accompaniment from regional UNOM. Regional promoters of Rural Aqueducts Division of ENACAL (ENACAL-DAR) attended the other 27 CAPS in 6 municipalities and represent the “centralized model.”

In addition, all UNOM promoters involved were interviewed, as well as 11 municipal governments. The advances, achievement, opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses of the decentralization process were analyzed jointly with the regional UNOM personnel of ENACAL-DAR Matagalpa. The existing literature and documents were studied.

The combination of all this quantitative and qualitative information and its analysis is reflected in this document, which permits conclusions and recommendations to be made for each party involved (CAPS, Regional UNOM, Municipal UNOM, municipal governments, Central ENACAL-GAR, implementers, donors and national government).

From the viewpoint of the CAPS, decentralization is a success: the decentralized model responds better to their demands. In addition, decentralization has significantly helped reduce the burden of ENACAL-GAR Matagalpa’s Regional UNOM.

Nonetheless, this Regional UNOM is still very overburdened, with regional promoters still attending an average of 145 communities, and still attending and accompanying the municipal promoters. The lack of personnel and to a lesser degree of resources are determining factors in the Regional UNOM’s low response to the demands and needs of the CAPS. In Region V, the problem is so great that there is barely the capacity and adequate resources to initiate and facilitate a decentralization process.

The Municipal UNOMs are for the most part still weak. Their promoters have little professional preparation and training and little possibility of being trained, which puts the quality of their technical assistance into doubt. In many cases, they receive no financial or
institutional support from the mayor’s office itself and have no means of transportation or fuel and no office or materials. They have low salaries and lack labor stability. In such difficult and discouraging circumstances, the motivation level of their promoters and the numerous results of their work are surprising. The lack of institutionalization, training and financing for the municipal UNOM determines the decentralized model’s low response to the needs and demands of the CAPS.

The majority of the recommendations are aimed at measures to eliminate or reduce these limiting factors, from the vision that the sustainability of the rural potable water systems is a responsibility shared by community members, municipal governments and the central government. Financial contributions to UNOM from community members should be combined with the search for local solutions by municipal governments and the construction of a more favorable national setting (legal framework, national and sectoral institutions, adequate transfers to the local governments) by the central government and its state entities.

The most important overall recommendation is to seek and strengthen the complementarity between municipal and regional UNOM, instead of seeking to replace the latter with the former. Without Regional UNOM, decentralization was impossible, and the good functioning of regional UNOM continues to be indispensable in the decentralized model. Regional UNOM should continue functioning to facilitate decentralization to the municipal governments and train and accompany municipal promoters, and as a reference point for difficult cases in communities, a regional rural laboratory, an information center about the water and sewage situation and the needs for new investments and rehabilitation in the region and a bridge between the donor organizations and Municipal UNOMs. In addition, they need to continue attending the communities in municipalities that have no municipal UNOM.

The central government’s role must not only be to establish laws, policies and sectoral norms, but also to oversee their fulfillment. The established project cycle is a good tool, and the implementers should respect it more, among other things with respect to turning the works over to UNOM.

The Nicaraguan Institute of Aqueducts and Sewage Systems (INAA) must be strengthened to fulfill these functions, with a presence in the rural areas and the installation of its Rural Department. In reality, many of UNOM’s functions are the legal competency of INAA, and it is thus recommended that a study be done of the possibilities of closer institutional relations (or fusion) between INAA and UNOM.

In addition, it is recommended that a legal framework be established that delineates the responsibilities, rights and duties of the state entities and other actors involved in sustaining the implemented works, and finally that more streamlined mechanisms to grant the CAPS legal status be promoted.

Decentralization without resources decentralizes problems. The optimum functioning of a Municipal UNOM costs around C$60,000 per year, or between C$1,000 and C$1,500 per job implemented. The majority of the municipal governments cannot assume all these
costs. It is recommended that the implementers reserve part of their project budget to strengthen and equip UNOM in the municipal governments; that UNOM (regional and municipal) implement pilot projects to cover some of their costs, charging the community members as beneficiaries of the services received; and that the central government design mechanisms to subsidize municipal governments that assume decentralized functions.

Despite all these possible actions, there will be municipalities that cannot take on a Municipal UNOM in their current circumstances. The viability of installing one will have to be assessed in each municipality based on a participatory evaluation with the mayor’s office.

The following individuals have made valuable contributions to the implementation of this investigation and/or drafting of the report:

Iván Ramón Lira Bustos  Head, Regional UNOM, Region VI: innumerable contributions throughout the process.
Oscar Tablada  Manager ENACAL-GAR Central: General supervision of the work.
Francisco Baltodano  Coordinator ENACAL-GAR Matagalpa: Preparation/conception and coordination of the field work.
Jairo Cruz  ENACAR-GAR Central: Contributions in drafting the report.
Rosa Urbina Soto  Head of PRASNIC Community Work: Preparation of field work.
Philippe Barragne Bigot  Head, Water and Health UNICEF-Nicaragua: review of document
Gabriel Zeledón Zeledón  Regional promoter ENACAL-GAR UNOM Region VI and
Boanerge Buschting  Regional promoter ENACAL-GAR UNOM Region VI and
Cristián Castellón  Regional promoter ENACAL-GAR UNOM Region VI: interviews with CAPS and analytical contributions.
Félix Raúl Úbeda Gómez  ENACAL-GAR Matagalpa: data entry.
Maricela Vado  ENACAL-GAR central: data entry.
Guillermo Coenen  Co-director SNV/PASOC and
Oscar Sánchez  Director SNV/PASOC: support in preparing and facilitating the field work in the southeast of the country.
Reina van Haeringen  SNV Senior Adviser on Local Management and
Sigrid Meijer  SNV Senior Adviser in Gender: valuable observations on report drafts.
Bart Boon  Specialist in statistics: support in interpreting the statistical data.
Liesbeth Meuwissen  Doctor: methodological contributions, review of numerous drafts, moral support.
Anneke Jeeninga  SNV Program Officer Matagalpa and
Roberto Sosa  SNV Program Officer Matagalpa: methodological contributions and moral support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Blandón Blandón</td>
<td>Supervisor Social Promoters Region VI: Supervision of the field work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan García</td>
<td>Computer Assistant Region VI: Data entry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro Guzmán Matamoro</td>
<td>Social Promoter Region VI: interview with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnulfo Matamoro</td>
<td>Municipal Promoter Tuma-La Dalia: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marieta Montes Mendiola</td>
<td>Social Promoter Region VI: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ángel Matamoro Martínez</td>
<td>Social Promoter Region VI: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejandro Martínez Rizo</td>
<td>Social Promoter Region VI: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramón Gutiérrez</td>
<td>Municipal Promoter Jinotega: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Palma</td>
<td>Head Technical Area, Region VI: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naúm Castro Arrauz</td>
<td>Social Promoter Region VI: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier Artola Flores</td>
<td>Social Promoter Region VI: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego Martínez Matamoro</td>
<td>Municipal Promoter San Ramón: interviews with CAPS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, we would like to express our gratitude to the representatives of the municipal governments who have given their valuable contributions during the Workshop to Strengthen the Municipal UNOM in Matagalpa, and to all the people interviewed for their openness and dedication of time.