

‘DRAGON OF THE NEW FLAME’: DRAMA AND ART TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DURING THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOGAS TECHNOLOGY

EXCHANGE ACTIVITY’S AIM: TO EXPAND THE METHODOLOGY AND DEVELOP A MANUAL FOR THE ARTS-BASED IMPLEMENTATION OF BIOGAS PROJECTS IN MARGINALISED LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Location:

States of Hidalgo and Yucatán, Mexico

Technology:

Biogas

Scope:

Capacity-building and knowledge sharing

Costs:

Total: € 30,360

WISIONS financial support: € 30,360

Host Organisation:

Instituto Internacional de Recursos Renovables (IRRI México)

www.irrimexico.org

ConcentrArte

www.concentrarte.org

Duration:

February – October 2014



Picture: WISIONS

EXCHANGE NEED AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this exchange activity was to encourage the greater adoption and the long-term sustainability of biogas in rural communities in Mexico, ultimately improving the livelihoods of these communities. Its specific objective was to further test and expand an existing methodology that motivates and educates potential and existing biogas adopters.

This innovative methodology uses art and drama as key elements of community engagement. The holistic approach was developed by two Mexican not-for-profit organisations, the International Renewable Resources Institute (IRRI) and the NGO ConcentrArte. It was originally developed for the purpose of engaging communities in rainwater harvesting, one of the core activities of IRRI. Inspired by the success of the model, IRRI wanted to expand this

approach into the field of biogas in collaboration with the social enterprise Sistema Biobolsa, an IRRI incubator project.

Sistema Biobolsa manufactures and supplies modular bag biogas to small and medium-scale farmers in Mexico. With a strong development focus, Sistema Biobolsa emphasises capacity-building and community engagement and the “Dragon of the New Flame” approach has proven very effective.

The “Dragon of the New Flame” is the main character of the tale on which the educational programme hinges, entitled “The Legend of the New Flame”. This dragon is blue and spits out a blue flame, which is the colour of the flame produced when burning biogas. Its counterpart is the red dragon, who spits out the orange/red flame of wood and conventional fuels. The core elements of this methodology revolve around the colours, shapes and concepts of

this story.

PARTICIPANTS & TARGET GROUP(S)

The activities were targeted at three different groups: early adopters of biogas, prospective adopters and whole communities. The activities took place at times tailored to selected sub-groups, such as female biogas users and children. Many of the activities targeted school children because of their role in future adoption and because they are known to act as envoys of knowledge, carrying messages across the community via their households.

ACTIVITIES

The many activities and events that took place in the participating communities over the course of the project had six main elements, which were combined in different ways depending on the audiences and

context:

- Travelling theatre play: the partners wrote the "Legend of the New Flame" as a play and performed it at various locations to community audiences.
- Games: targeted mainly at children, these were tailored to the messages and needs of the programme and included a giant board game called "Red Flame, Blue Flame".
- Art workshops, in which adults or children used colours and words and worked jointly or individually to express their knowledge of and feelings about biodigesters.
- Group activities combining a variety of methods, for example using photography for a targeted discussion on community needs with adults, or using relaxation/mind visualisation techniques with children to help in the understanding of biogas technology.
- Celebratory community gatherings, centred around open-air cinema and shared food.

In addition, the play was adapted into a [film](#) and produced by professional filmmakers so a video format would be available in locations where a live performance was not possible. Lastly, a video was produced for dissemination on the project's [achievements](#), as well as two open-access tutorials for workshop facilitators (available [here](#) and [here](#)). These complement the core outcome of the project, which is a manual for use by other organisations and stakeholders working on the promotion of biogas and other renewable energies.



RESULTS & IMPACT

The activity demonstrated that this holistic and participatory approach was effective in:

- Raising awareness on topics such as indoor air pollution, greenhouse gas reduction, deforestation and improved water and sanitation;
- Building emotional connections to the technology;
- Fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among individuals and the community;
- Delivering messages about what biodigesters are and how they work, their benefits in terms of economic savings to the household, health improvements and environmental protection;
- Collecting feedback from existing and prospective users on their needs and experiences;
- Addressing concerns and creating an atmosphere of trust to prevent potential communication deadlocks;
- Identifying future potential biogas adopters and bringing them together with existing ones.

A key outcome of the project was the [manual](#) that was put together to help replication in other contexts and other Latin American countries. It outlines the concept of the holistic methodology and describes specific exercises that can be applied within the communities.

The project's achievements were showcased to other biogas actors at the annual gathering of the Latin America biogas

network [RedBioLAC](#).

LESSONS LEARNED

When in the hands of expert practitioners, the linking of art and technology can drive sustainable energy solutions to the heart of communities. Some of the lessons learned include the need to have a strong understanding between the technology experts and the community engagement specialists, and to gradually build trust with the target communities.

While the methodology was applied in communities that have had experience with Biobolsa digesters, the approach could be transferred to other small-scale biodigester projects and could be used to support any new energy technology in the early stages of its adoption.



Source: Final Report submitted to WISIONS by IRRI and ConcentrArte in February 2015

Picture: WISIONS