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**SONORA, MEXICO,
MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT:
DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT OF
THE CITY OF FRONTERAS**

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ABSTRACT

The Sonora, Mexico, Municipal Development (SMMD) Project was initiated in response to the local government demand for autonomy in Mexico. Under this USAID-funded project, ICMA will provide technical assistance and training to six municipalities in the state of Sonora, Mexico: Agua Prieta, Cananea, Nacozari, Fronteras, Naco, and Bacoachi. The purpose of the SMMD project is to improve the capacity of the six municipalities in promoting and increasing citizen participation in municipal government decision-making and processes; managing the quality of their urban environment; promoting sustainable economic growth by addressing managerial, environmental, and economic problems that impede development; and developing stronger municipal partnerships along the U.S.–Mexico border both through Mexican inter-municipal cooperation and U.S.–Mexico partnerships. This report describes the diagnostic assessment completed by the ICMA technical assistance team in the City of Fronteras.

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SONORA, MEXICO, MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

1 INTRODUCTION

The Sonora, Mexico, Municipal Development (SMMD) Project was initiated in response to the local government demand for autonomy in Mexico. Under this USAID-funded project, ICMA will provide technical assistance and training to six municipalities in the state of Sonora, Mexico. The cities (and their estimated populations) are Agua Prieta (80,000), Cananea (35,000), Nacozari (18,000), Fronteras (8,000), Naco (8,000), and Bacoachi (1,800). This report describes the diagnostic assessment and recommendations completed by the ICMA technical assistance team in the City of Fronteras.

The purpose of the SMMD is to improve the capacity of the six municipalities in promoting and increasing citizen participation in municipal government decision-making and processes; managing the quality of their urban environment; promoting sustainable economic growth by addressing managerial, environmental, and economic problems that impede municipal development; and developing stronger municipal partnerships along the U.S.–Mexico border both through Mexican intermunicipal cooperation and U.S.–Mexico partnerships.

This project has the potential for providing several models that can be replicated by the rest of the municipalities in the scope of this project and throughout Mexico. The technical assistance team is contributing knowledge of “best practices” in municipal management and in the sharing of resources. The team will provide SMMD municipalities with models for technical manuals that can be adapted to the local situation. These models for local and regional cooperation among U.S. local governments offer solutions for common problems and issues through resource sharing and could be used by Mexico’s municipalities to address regional problems. The models have special potential for Mexican municipalities that share regional issues with U.S. municipalities along the border, in the states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. The team will also provide citizen and employee participation models that can be used to institutionalize different people in the decision-making process.

Phase I of the SMMD is the technical assistance component. This phase involves conducting a diagnostic of each of the municipalities. The diagnostic will involve all aspects of the municipalities’ operations, including urban environmental problems of potable water, wastewater, solid waste collection and disposal, hazardous wastes, and air pollution. In addition, municipal management practices, finance, budget, citizen participation, and strategies for economic development will be examined. Phase I seeks to improve municipal effectiveness and efficiency, identifying new resources of revenue for the improvement of basic service delivery and increased infrastructure investment. Citizen participation and influence in municipal governments’ decision-making are a key component of Phase I.

Phase II of the project will provide further technical assistance and training to the community and government leaders in prioritizing and implementing the project's findings and recommendations.

2 METHODOLOGY

The technical assistance team conducted an orientation meeting with the Mayor, Councilmembers, and other key personnel of Fronteras to discuss the objectives and the scope of the project. Some community leaders were also present. Because of the small size of Fronteras and the presence of Fronteras' leaders at the orientation, they were asked for their perspectives of the problems facing their community and government and the objectives they sought to achieve.

Basic municipal documents such as ordinances, codes, regulations, and organizational plans were not immediately accessible. A municipal budget summary was posted on a city hall bulletin board. A community development plan was mentioned as existing, but the technical assistance team did not receive a copy of this document until the second visit.

The technical assistance team was given a tour of the city and its basic infrastructure. During this tour it was discovered that Fronteras is a *municipio* that encompasses seven other communities (see below). The technical assistance team returned for a second visit to Fronteras to discuss the issues of Fronteras being able to serve the needs of the *municipio*.

3 GENERAL MUNICIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

The City of Fronteras has a population of 1,800. The City of Fronteras provides most municipal services to the *municipio* of 8,155 inhabitants. The *municipio* of Fronteras includes seven other communities:

Community	Population	Distance from Fronteras (kilometers)
Ejido 47	350	6
Esquedo	5,000	20
Ruiz Cartinez	150	10
Cuciarachi	350	1
Turicachi	450	30
La Valdezo	20	28
El Yan	35	8

Fronteras' economy is primarily agriculture, cattle raising and processing, and light maquiladora industry.

The City of Fronteras is governed by a Mayor and seven Councilmembers. The larger communities of the *municipio* have their own *cabildo* (local council). The city has 54 employees in four major functions: general administration, public works, police and security, and community development.

4 DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT AND OBSERVATIONS

Following from the technical assistance team's group orientation and follow-up meeting with Fronteras' political and community leadership, this section is presented in two parts. Part 1 describes the leadership's consensus on community vision and major objectives. Part 2 discusses the city's daily operational needs in providing services and programs.

4.1 Community Vision and Objectives

It is difficult to provide effective municipal services to the communities of the *municipio* with the lack of resources, the physical distance between Fronteras and the communities, and the scarcity of regional cooperation. Financial resources, equipment, supplies/tools, citizen participation, and skills in facilitating regional cooperation are needed.

The Mayor emphasized the need for regional cooperation in the *municipio* to provide basic municipal services and to develop a local economic development infrastructure and capacity to fund those services. Regional cooperation is needed to share financial resources, facilities, and infrastructure.

The Mayor describes three areas of priority. The city's garbage disposal dump is located in a wash on the outskirts of the city, which empties into a basin in the city's center. During heavy rains the wash floods and deposits the garbage in the city's center. It can take as long as two weeks for the flood water to evaporate from the basin before the garbage can be cleaned out. A regional sanitary landfill should be built to serve the needs of the *municipio*. There is also a need to construct a canal system that will channel the flood waters away from the city's center.

The second priority is the development of a dependable water system. The water system is owned and operated by the state government. The system is 40 years old, and the water lines (a combination of PVC and asbestos pipes) are in need of replacement. Ninety percent of the city's residents are connected to the water system. Water distribution facilities are in disrepair. Two months of the year, the higher parts of the city experience low water pressure due to low holding and pumping capacity. The city has occasionally lacked potable water because of this problem.

The third priority is the building of the city and *municipio's* economic development capacity. An industrial park has been envisioned as a means to attract the maquiladora industries. Currently, there are two minor maquiladora operations: one in Fronteras that employs 120 persons and one in Esqueda that employs 25 persons. The objective is to increase regional cooperation and contacts to address this objective.

The Mayor expounded on the need for the *municipio* and its citizens to become aware of this vision of an industrial park through citizen participation. Traditionally, citizen participation has meant attendance at Council meetings to discuss how state revenue sharing will be spent. The culture of "government will provide" inhibits citizen participation, however. Without a culture of citizen participation it will be difficult to have the community share and commit to a vision for which the city may impose fees and taxes to get the necessary resources.

A community development plan, developed two years ago, could be the catalyst for addressing Fronteras' vision and its three objectives through community participation. A review of the community development plan could be suggested to the new administration that will take office in September 1997.

4.2 Daily Operational Needs

Fronteras provides many programs and services to its city and *municipio*. The effective delivery of those services is limited due to inadequate resources: state revenue sharing and local revenue generation are not sufficient to meet the needs of the community. The basic needs of Fronteras are as follows:

Solid Waste Collection Equipment. Fronteras has one garbage collection truck, which is 25 years old, to serve the 8,155 inhabitants of the *municipio*. Fronteras is also in need of approximately 500 sanitation dumpsters.

Street Lighting and Maintenance Equipment. Fronteras has approximately 85 kilometers of streets to maintain. It has no municipally-owned street maintenance equipment and needs a street scraper and a backhoe excavator. Fronteras is also in need of street lighting.

Water Production and Distribution Equipment. Fronteras is in need of a 250 million liter capacity water tank. A modern water pump with replacement parts and a maintenance plan is needed. The water distribution lines (PVC and asbestos pipes) need to be replaced.

Public Safety Equipment. An ambulance with equipment and supplies is needed. No such equipment or supplies exist in the *municipio*. Base radio and two way radios are needed to link the police department with the ambulance.

Social Services Supplies. A variety of ongoing social services needs exist. These include family and infant food supplies; clothing; medical supplies; and medical equipment such as wheelchairs, stethoscopes, and diagnostic equipment.

5 GENERAL DIAGNOSTIC OBSERVATIONS

The technical assistance team made the following general diagnostic observations. These should be addressed to determine reasonable and practical recommendations for achieving the project objectives.

5.1 Citizen Participation and Regional Cooperation. The Mayor and Councilmembers understand the need for citizen participation in the municipal decision-making process. Of greater importance is the need for broader participation by the citizens of Fronteras *municipio*. Fronteras faces difficult service delivery and economic development challenges in meeting the needs of the *municipio*'s citizens. The problem solving process will require regional analysis and cooperation.

5.2 Economic Development. The Mayor and Councilmembers should review the 1995-97 *Plan de Desarrollo Municipal*. This municipal development plan fundamentally addresses the challenges, resources (existing and needed), and objectives to achieve its vision of providing a sound economic development base and dependable basic municipal services. The existing plan can serve as a basis for an updated community development plan.

5.3 Leadership Skills Development. The Mayor and Councilmembers should identify current and potential community leaders. These people should receive training in political leadership, team building, citizen participation, and facilitation of regional cooperation.

5.4 Policy and Administrative Systems. The Mayor and Councilmembers should establish basic policy and administrative systems. The Mayor should codify all municipal codes, laws, ordinances, rules, regulations, financial and budgetary information, planning and organizational documents, and personnel information to serve as a basis for effective and continuous municipal management.

5.5 Dissemination of Best Practices. The replication of models of municipal "best practices" has high potential in Fronteras. This is especially the case in models for citizen participation, regional cooperation, and technical manuals.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

The general diagnostic observations and recommendations have been discussed with the Mayor of Fronteras. The Mayor has agreed to consider the recommendations, and considering the short time period left in his term of office, to recommend them to the incoming Mayor and administration (who will take office in September 1997).

6.1 Citizen Participation. The Mayor and Councilmembers should institutionalize policies and procedures to publicize and open to the public regular City Council meetings. The Mayor should

actively maintain relationships with the *cabildos* of the communities in the *municipio*, the agricultural community, and industry.

6.2 Regional Cooperation. The Mayor and Councilmembers should begin a process of identifying and building a network of regional leaders and set up an infrastructure for regional cooperation on Fronteras' municipal service delivery and economic development goals and objectives. The existing municipal development plan should be used as a basis.

6.3 Economic Development. The 1995–97 municipal development plan should be reviewed with a focus on economic development objectives. The plan contains several objectives for economic development in agriculture, forestry, industry (maquiladoras), tourism, and commerce.

6.4 Leadership Skills Development. The Mayor and Councilmembers should identify current and potential community leaders. These people should receive training in political leadership, team building, citizen participation, and facilitation of regional cooperation.

6.5 Policy and Administration Systems. The Mayor should direct the codification and centralization of all municipal codes, laws, ordinances, rules, regulations, financial and budgetary information, planning and organizational documents, and personnel information to serve as a basis for effective and continuous municipal management.

6.6 Dissemination of Best Practices. The replication of models of municipal “best practices” has high potential in Fronteras. This is especially the case in models for citizen participation, regional cooperation, and technical manuals.