

USAID Success Story

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What happens to a community when the trash trucks stop running? My community, which is situated in the municipality of Huauchinango, Puebla, is currently facing a waste management crisis. Local landfills are full and people no longer have a place to put their trash. People have resorted to burning trash or throwing bags into the local lake, causing occasional forest fires as well as air and water contamination. It was essential that we start thinking big about recycling.

Through the financial support of a USAID SPA grant, I initiated a regional plastic recycling project. My host country agency, CONANP, works closely with a local fishermen's collective, who for years have organized weekly community cleanups in the local lake. The fishermen remove almost 4 tons of waste from the lake each year, most of which is plastic. The USAID funded SPA grant permitted me to invest in a plastic chopping machine, which reduces plastic volume (making it much easier to transport) and also triples its monetary value (chopped plastic is worth roughly \$8/kilo while whole plastic is worth about \$3/kilo). The plastic chopper gives the fishermen the means to recycle and profit from the lake's plastic.

In addition, the fishermen provide a free plastic recycling pick-up service for four local schools, benefitting 1,076 students, 43 teachers and their families. To motivate the schools to participate, the monetary value of their yearlong plastic contribution will be given to the schools in the form of an in-kind donation of materials at the end of every school year. These materials are chosen by the teachers and used specifically to help the schools initiate their own projects that mitigate or adapt the institutions to changing climate conditions. At the end of this 2018-2019 school year, four local schools collected a combined total of 30 LED light bulbs, two paper and aluminum recycling bins and a rainwater catchment system. Since the project initiation in October, the four local schools have recycled a total of 5,289 pounds of plastic, averaging 587.5 pounds per month. That's 5,289 pounds that could have been burned, littered in the streets, or thrown into the lake. Fortunately, this project has been accepted enthusiastically by locals and has had an immense impact on the local environment.