



Spotlight

Interview with

Ms. Sarah Maria Alocer Delano

General Officer at the Comision
Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro

PUB: Please tell us about yourself and your company / organisation.

Sarah: I am an open-minded individual always eager to learn about different subjects and cultures. As a professional, I have a bachelor's degree in law and a master's degree in corporate law. Additionally, I am a certified urgency technician (Paramedic). I have worked in the Comision Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro for the last 4 years. The Comision Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro in Mexico is the public utility in charge of providing the water services in the State. It reports to the Governor of the State and members of the cabinet such as the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Public Infrastructure, the Minister of State Audit and the Mayor for the Municipality of Queretaro. The roles and operations are similar to PUB.

My current role involves the analyzation, implementation and verification of current and new regulations, including risk identification and management. This is equivalent of a compliance state auditor which plays a key role in developing internal protocols to ensure transparency. These protocols impact the Board's decisions which have a direct influence in the State. My aspiration is to create better governance policies and regulations for the future. I believe it is important to find commonalities between different regulation codes and adopt the best practices from other countries and private companies to create better management practices.

PUB: Could you tell us more about the situation of the water sector in the markets/countries your organization operates in, such as the water supply network or water treatment market? Which issues in particular do you think are most important/are most pressing?



Ms. Sarah (centre) engaging local governors on water projects in Mexico.

Sarah: Water is a scarce and indispensable resource. Each country regulates the use and quality and Mexico is not an exception. However, the current regulations were last amended in 1991 and they do not bode well with new economic activities. Without updated regulations, there is no shared responsibility between the public and the private sector to bear the rising cost of water which the government must provide and protect.

In Mexico, the lack of a proper legislation for water resources has allowed water to become a political tool that is subjected to corruption. This resulted in uncertainty that has left the Mexican people with a lack of basic water infrastructure and resources. There is still a large percentage of the population that has no access to water, and our population is growing and migrating to urban areas, increasing their water needs and demands. We need a more sustainable management solutions and alternatives to achieve water security.

PUB: What are some of the key water management challenges that you are tackling in your work at Comision Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro?



Ms Sarah (fourth from the left in the bottom row) at the HydroBID, PepsiCo and CEA Qro project completion event.

Sarah: The Comision Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro, which extracts 60% of its water from mountains 120km away, has one of the biggest and most challenging infrastructure projects called Aqueduct II. However, with rapid growth and increased economic development, there was a need to seek out more sustainable water sources to provide water for all.

We need better management, planning and implementation of the best practices to ensure everyone has access to water. We have worked on several projects with the Inter-American Development Bank to develop new innovative practices for water sustainability. For example, we have worked with PepsiCo on the HydroBID and HydroBID Flood project, and with GIZ and AQUARATING to provide an integrated water and resources management system. This was achieved using different technologies to create databases and hydrological models for planning purposes.

This has also led to our collaboration with the World Bank to reduce non-revenue water losses in Mexico. For example, in 2015, the non-revenue water losses were around 60%. We had to installed new meters to improve commercial efficiency of water utilities to ensure water sustainability.

PUB: What are some personal stories that you have garnered, based on your experience in these projects?

Sarah: The most memorable would be to lay the ground rules for internal compliance and regulations that did not exist within the Ministry. For the past 30 years, we had operated without proper internal guidelines and accountability. It was a challenge to understand the needs of all the stakeholders and get their consensus on the new set of regulations. However, it was necessary as I am of the view that regulations protect and empower stakeholders to do their jobs. It is important that these regulations are flexible and address the current needs. Otherwise, these regulations will be pointless, and people will not adhere to it.

More recently in 2019, I was part of the team to inaugurate the 1st integrated water system in the highlands. It was a challenge for the Ministry to provide water in these communities¹ as these towns are more than 400 years old, surrounded by large mountains and there were no water infrastructures. These communities had no access to tap water and had to collect water along the rivers which they had no control over the water quality. Thus, this integrated water system that connected 101 communities with more than 35,000 beneficiaries had completely changed their lives. It was a meaningful project, but this was only the beginning and there were a lot still to be done.

¹ <https://www.ceaqueretaro.gob.mx/sistemas-de-agua-en-la-sierra/>

PUB: There is a need for global collaboration to co-create solutions that address the world's water challenges. The Singapore Water Academy has a broad alumni network, comprising management executives and technical staff. What possible collaborations do you see between your organization and other alumni?

Sarah: Our generation is facing the uncertainty of water security. We have to come up with different management solutions to improve water sustainability and integrating these practices will be the game-changer.

For the past 30 years, The Comision Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro has improved the water situation in Mexico by building new infrastructure and implementing results-based solutions to improve operations. In 2015, under the leadership of the Minister Enrique Abedrop Rodriguez, The Comision Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro has implemented policies to tighten budget management to improve the financial situation. This resulted in the Comision Estatal De Aguas De Queretaro achieving an "AA" grading from the Fitch Ratings, becoming one of the 3 main and best public water utility in Mexico. In 2019, we obtained the AquaRating certification by Inter-American Development Bank/International Water Association, and Minister Enrique was accorded with the "AGUADOR" personal recognition by the National Association of Water and Sanitation Companies (ANEAS) for his outstanding contributions and achievement's in the water sector.

Despite the achievements and progress, there is still much to learn from the world, and we look forward to learning the best practices to improve the water situation in Mexico.

PUB: You attended the Singapore Water Management Series. What are some of the valuable takeaways from this programme for you?



Group picture of the Singapore Water Management Series on Stormwater Management (8 to 12 July 2019). Ms. Sarah is seated second from the left in the bottom row.

Sarah: It has been an incredible experience. Singapore has a lot to offer to the world with its own water story. The Singapore Water Management Series has integrated the experiences of worldwide experts and companies, and is a one-stop training programme to learn about Singapore's strategy towards water sustainability. As a young water professional, I am glad to attend the Singapore Water Management Series which have shared valuable insights that will enable myself to create better water policies and strategies for the future.