

Inclusive waste management on the agenda of mayoral candidates

Juanita Mendoza

Changing attitudes and paradigms is sometimes not an easy task, but once we understand it is possible and that we have a duty to promote change, we can take action to achieve the desired results.

That is why, through the DEALS programme, we have taken the initiative to try and ensure that integrated and inclusive waste management is on the agenda of Pereira's public and private sectors.

It has taken a long time but we are satisfied with the results. It all started with a discussion among the DEALS Pereira team, where it was suggested that we organise a debate among Pereira's mayoral candidates on how to improve waste management and humanise the process of collection and separation.

Since the end of 2018, we have focussed on instigating a discussion with mayoral candidates. We began by arranging to meet them individually to present the work resulting from the cooperation agreement and to familiarise them with the problems that Pereira faces in this area.

This first phase was positive, because we succeeded in meeting all nine mayoral candidates. We explained the context and the local situation and they told us how they saw the development of the Risaralda capital over the next four years.

Our first meeting was with Carolina Bustamante and then, successively, Yesid Rozo (now out of the race), Carlos Maya, Carlos Crosthwaite, Jesús María Hernández, Adriana López, Alejandro García, Carlos Botero and Mauricio Salazar.

It was certainly a rewarding exercise and gave the candidates for Pereira's mayoral office a better understanding of waste management, which involves much more than is generally realised and is not just about organising collections.

With their interest in the issue aroused, the candidates asked their advisors to look into it further and our experts were always ready to respond to their questions and deal with their concerns.

The most assiduous in this task were Adriana López and Alejandro García, who both actively sought to deepen their understanding of the issue, especially García, who, along with his advisors, visited recyclers' associations and recognised their important role in the waste management chain.

Allies

We needed strategic allies to help us and VNG International to highlight the importance of waste management issues. So we tried to speak to institutions such as the Technological and Andean Area Universities. This proved difficult as it was a regional election year and of crucial importance to them so they were focused on raising their own priorities with the candidates.

But we were able to identify useful partners (ANDI, the Avina Foundation, CEMPRES, a business association committed to recycling, and the Retorna Group) to help us achieve our aim of encouraging the eight mayoral candidates in the coffee-producing region's most important city to take action and incorporate an inclusive waste management system as a central plank in their plans for government.

We then turned our attention to media outlets that would publicise our initiative. Ecos 1360 radio station and the Pereira website En Vivo ensured we had an audience and participation.

In our search for the broadest participation possible, we knocked on the doors of the largest companies in the city and the region. So we were able to attract the participation of Frisby S.A. and its environmental manager, Paula Quintana; Lina María Álvarez Vélez; Section Manager, ANDI Risaralda-Quindío; and Juan Carlos Gutiérrez Cano, Chief Executive of Ekored.

At this point, we include some links to news about our event on **“Integrated and Inclusive Waste Management for a Sustainable Pereira”**, published by our allies and the media.

28/Aug

- <https://www.eldiario.com.co/debate-por-una-pereira-sostenible-con-candidatos-a-la-alcaldia/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/B1ta8D6Hba3/?igshid=zliyo988plgs>
- <https://www.facebook.com/100588394652398/posts/104507624260475?sfns=mo>
- <http://areapolitica.com/candidatos-debatiran-sobre-gestion-de-residuos-solidos-y-economia-circular/>

29/Aug



30/Aug

- <https://ecos1360.com/este-lunes-ecos-1360-transmite-el-debate-con-candidatos-a-la-alcaldia-de-pereiragestion-integral-e-inclusiva-de-residuos-para-una-pereira-sostenible/>
- <https://risaraldahoy.com/candidatos-a-la-alcaldia-de-pereira-debatiran-sobre-gestion-de-residuos-solidos-y-economia-circular/>

The project provided carefully-prepared materials on the national and local situation to mayoral candidates, several of whom acknowledged the importance of the information for policy development and the preparation of their Development Plan.

Candidates were provided with hard copy and digital files about the format of the debate and the questions they would be required to answer.

The key day

The publicity was successful and more than 250 people came to hear how Pereira uses waste picker organisations to manage its waste and to hear mayoral candidates give their views on the issue.

Presentations on the situation in the sector were made by Laura Reyes, chief executive of CEMPRE; Jadira Vivanco representing the Avina Foundation and the Regional Recycling Initiative (IRR); and Andrés Santana, Chief Executive of the Red Green Corporation / Retorna Group. Felipe Vásquez, an expert representing DEALS in Pereira and VNG International made a presentation on waste management in Pereira.

Irene Oostveen, Senior Projects Manager for VNG International introduced the debate, saying “I am really very happy that all the eight mayoral candidates are here to discuss environmental issues, waste, the role of waste pickers, public-private cooperation and the universities and we are very happy that the candidates are committed to dealing with the issue if elected mayor”.

The well-known journalist, Fernando Umaña of the El Tiempo publishing house and Bert Keesman, a councillor in the municipality of Weesp in the Netherlands co-chaired the debate in a fair and sensitive way designed to elicit answers to questions on how to use waste, the inclusion and formalisation of waste pickers in public service provision, the Ministry of the Environment’s National Circular Economy Strategy, public policies on packaging and containers, single-use plastics, the post-consumption management of special wastes and landfill.

The final part of the day was a panel presentation by business people chaired by Linda Breukers, an environmental expert working on projects of the European Commission and also a member of VNG International. The panel featured Paula Quintana, environmental manager at Frisby S.A.; Lina María Álvarez Vélez, Section Manager at ANDI Risaralda-Quindío; and Juan Carlos Gutiérrez Cano, Chief Executive of Ekored.

Candidates, business operators, attendees, members of associations and organisations praised the event for putting one of the city’s crucial issues on the agenda of mayoral candidates.

Fabián Velásquez, a waste picker, said: “the event left me with very high expectations to share with my colleagues and it is good we are publicising

the situation of waste pickers in the country and in our city; I am pleased we have a job to do and we are going to study it”.

Although there had been the impression that the mayoral candidates would not be so interested in this issue, it is clear we put it on the agenda of local government. Previously, the municipal administration was giving little thought to integrated and inclusive waste management. It is also clear that the debate served as a marker for voters to assess which candidate is the best person to deal with an issue that has been ignored until now. The city administration has not done much more than what it is legally required to do but the issue will now feature in the Municipal Development Plan 2020-2023.

See the following links for coverage of the event.

DURING

2/Sep

- <https://www.facebook.com/DEALS-Pereira-464343294391243/>
- <https://twitter.com/Oostv/status/1168611104307785730?s=08>
- <http://www.elblogdelministro.com/2019/09/espuelas.html>
- <https://twitter.com/oostv>

AFTER

3/Sep

- <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/gestion-de-residuos-tema-de-debate-entre-candidatos-a-alcaldia-de-pereira-408224>
- <http://www.eje21.com.co/2019/09/aspirantes-a-alcaldia-de-pereira-comprometidos-con-la-gestion-inclusiva-de-residuos-solidos/>
- <https://www.elpereirano.com/candidatos-comprometidos/>

4/Sep

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiWx9xUEopY&feature=youtu.be>
- <https://www.ciudadregion.com/politica/candidatos-a-la-alcaldia-de-pereira-califican-como-mala-la-gestion-de-residuos-solidos-en-la-ciudad>

6/Sep

- <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/aprovechamiento-de-residuos-solidos-en-pereira-es-muy-bajo-409294>
- <http://www.colombiano24.com/nacional/pereira-en-deuda-en-la-gestion-de-residuos-solidos-y-recicladores/106891-noticias>