



AQUALIA, END-TO-END GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS TO PRES

Developing social action programs and mechanisms to guarantee universal access to water within a sustainability framework is part of the challenges set by several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the case of Aqualia, the contribution to these goals is supported through direct environmental and social collaboration initiatives in the communities where it provides services.

End-to-end water cycle management companies have been working eagerly to achieve the SDGs since the 2030

Agenda was set out. As a full member of the Global Compact, Aqualia promotes and integrates the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact into its corporate culture and is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, developing and taking part in projects and actions that contribute to achieving them.

IFM Investors' grants help investee companies collaborate with community organizations on projects with environmental and social benefits

International sustainable initiative

These projects include two initiatives developed in close collaboration with the NGOs SEO Birdlife in Medina del

Campo (Valladolid, Spain) and Trianon in Ostrava (Czech Republic). Both projects were selected by Global fund manager IFM Investors from more than 20 projects submitted to its Community Grants Program, which it organizes on a global scale among its portfolio companies, including Aqualia.

IFM's Community Grants Program aims to support social or environmental initiatives carried out by non-profit organizations/NGOs in partnership with IFM's portfolio companies, such as Aqualia in Spain. These grants seek to support local communities through environmental and social project collaborations. The beneficiary projects must meet the following eligibility criteria to qualify for one of the grants: aim to make communities more inclusive, safe, resilient and/or sustainable; expect



WATER MANAGEMENT SERVE THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

identifiable and measurable social and/or environmental outcomes; and be aligned with the corporate strategy and objectives of the company submitting the proposal.

The grant amount is up to 40,000 Australian dollars per project (or local currency equivalent - about 25,000 euros) and is awarded directly to the non-profit organization/NGO with which the company is collaborating on the grant project.

In 2019, IFM ran a pilot program of these grants among its Australian investee companies and, following its success, in 2020 it was extended to all of its infrastructure portfolio companies globally.

Restoration of the Medina del Campo Wetland (Valladolid)

In 2020, the IFM's Community Grants Program awarded through Aqualia a grant to the bird conservation organization SEO Birdlife, to support restoration work in the Medina del Campo Wetland, located around the overflow of the Zapardiel River (Valladolid, Spain). The project aims to improve biodiversity and protect the local fauna through the enhancement of the wetland site. It will also create an environmental education centre for schoolchildren to help disseminate environmental information about the project in the area.

The little gull, garganey and whiskered tern are just three of the approximately 120 bird species found in the aquatic habitat and surrounding area of a water treatment wetland system in the Spanish town of Medina del Campo. While some species live there permanently, others use

it as a stopover site during their annual migration.

With the help of funds from IFM's grants program, Aqualia, in partnership with SEO Birdlife, will continue to work on the restoration of the wetland ecosystem that already began in 2008 when its wastewater treatment plant next to the wetland system started operations. Aqualia had observed that the treatment ponds had become a recur-

Restoring the wetland system in Medina del Campo supports the sustainable treatment of wastewater and helps protect biodiversity



Interview with Lauren Owens

Senior Associate, Responsible Investment and Grants Program Administrator at IFM Investors.

"Activities that support the wellbeing of the communities in which we invest and operate are an important part of our approach"

Global fund manager IFM Investors, owned by a group of Australian pension funds, was established more than 25 years ago with the aim to protect and grow the long-term retirement savings of working people. It seeks to prioritise the interests of investors worldwide by focusing on assets that combine excellent long-term risk/reward characteristics with broad economic

and social benefits to the community. As a signatory to the United Nations-supported Principles for Responsible Investment, IFM actively engages on environmental, social and governance issues with the companies in which it invests. In this brief interview, Lauren Owens, administrator of the grant program, describes IFM's Infrastructure Community Grants Program.

How did the IFM's Community Grants Program come about?

IFM developed its Infrastructure Community Grants Program with the aim of supporting its portfolio companies to collaborate with local community organisations on projects that create mutual benefits. The program was launched globally in March 2020 following a pilot program among Australian portfolio companies. Applications for the 2021 program have closed and the successful grant recipients will be announced before the end of the year.

What aspects stand out in the selected Aqualia proposals? What are the differential points of these candidacies?

IFM receives a range of unique project proposals. Successful proposals clearly demonstrate planned collaboration between a portfolio company and community organisation, as well as the expected environmental and/or social impacts of the project. Projects may focus on enhancing the local environment, providing pathways to employment for underrepresented members of the community, or both.

ring stopover location for birds during migration.

Instead of replacing the old wastewater filtration system, the company chose to protect and maintain it, and launched a sustainable water treatment and reuse project that has increased biodiversity, water quality and water level stability in the wetland ecosystem.

The construction of nests on the water surface and in the vegetation surrounding the wetlands has helped create conditions that attract an increasing number of bird species. Each year, SEO Birdlife conducts a census of the bird

population and the species diversity in the wetland system. Populations have increased since the project began and, at last count, the annual population amounted to approximately 8,600 individuals. Since November 2020, five new species have been recorded in the area, including the Savi's warbler, in what was the first sighting of this species in the province in five years.

An important part of the project involves the creation of an environmental education centre for local schoolchildren that aims to increase environmental awareness and understanding. Cameras have been installed in the wetlands to make virtual tours possible until in-person tours are possible, subject to Covid-19 restrictions.

For Aqualia, caring for the environment is an intrinsic part of daily end-to-end water cycle management. The partnership with SEO Birdlife to restore the wetland system supports the sustainable treatment of wastewater and, at the same

Czech association Trianon has received a commercial vehicle that will help further develop its social entrepreneurship programs



Successful proposals also demonstrate the project's alignment to the company's business strategy or corporate responsibility priorities to support a commercial benefit.

How is the IFM's Community Grants Program framed within your sustainability and CSR policy agenda?

Activities that support the resilience and wellbeing of the communities in which we invest and operate are an important part of our responsible business approach. One of the ways we contribute to the sustain-

ability of these communities is through our Infrastructure Community Grants Program.

We know that strong local communities where we invest and operate are vital if we are to keep delivering on our purpose, which is to protect and grow the long-term retirement savings of working people.

What was the total amount devoted to the grants program? Can you provide details about the number of projects submitted and selected?

The 2020 program attracted more than 20 applications

from investee companies. Nine projects were selected to receive up to AU\$40,000 in grant funding. Grant funding has supported projects across the globe, including a social enterprise employing people with a disability in the Czech Republic, supporting seafarers' wellbeing at Australian ports, and environmental initiatives to improve water quality in waterways in Spain, the UK and Australia.

The 2021 program has attracted 24 project proposals. A final announcement of successful grant recipients will be made before the end of the year.



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"Successful proposals clearly demonstrate planned collaboration between a portfolio company and community organisation"



time, helps to increase and protect the biodiversity of this local ecosystem.

Inclusive employment in the Czech Republic

Thanks to IFM's Community Grants Program, the Czech association Trianon received a commercial vehicle adapted for people with disabilities that will help the NGO continue its social entrepreneurship programs in the field of circular economy.

The consolidated collaboration with SmVaK, Aqualia's Czech subsidiary that operates in the Moravia-Silesia region and the border regions of Poland, has helped the social and environmental organization to apply for this grant program and obtain it.

In addition to these projects driven by the collaboration with Aqualia, the 2020 Community Grants Program has helped fund nine projects around the world, and IFM hopes to continue to support more through its 2021 program.