

DR. KRISTY PEÑA-MUÑOZ

# PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY



In Germany it is normal practice to separate glass, plastic and paper when disposing of waste products, but as yet, this practice is not common in Mexico, which is why Kristy Peña-Muñoz is currently working on ideas for waste separation there. “Waste management in Mexico,” she says, “is 20 to 30 years behind Germany.” She is addressing this issue by advising Latin American countries on environment and sustainability issues. Peña-Muñoz is a graduate of the University of Stuttgart’s “Air Quality Control, Solid Waste and Waste Water Process Engineering” (WASTE) master’s program, and earned her doctorate in 2014 in the context of the Environment Water, ENWAT international doctoral program. She and her six employees have been working as a project developer for her own company, KFG EnviroSmart Solutions since January 2021, and would like to encourage other companies to separate their waste. Her plan is to produce biogas from organic waste, which, she says, would not only

generate renewable energy, but also money.

Peña-Muñoz became aware of the fact that not all conflicts in business have to do with technology; they sometimes arise from communication problems when, for instance, people do not understand another culture. She worked for Daimler in 2008 and 2009, where she spent a year at a plant in Sindelfingen near Stuttgart and another at a plant in Saltillo, northern Mexico. In retrospect, she says, Daimler Germany was different to Daimler Mexico. “Although it was the same company,” she says, “and we had German colleagues in Mexico, the mentalities were different.” “There were also differences in terms of the environment, she says. “Waste products in Sindelfingen were separated into about 200 different components. In Mexico, it was zero.” When Peña-Muñoz arrived in Saltillo, she discovered that, rather than being a technical issue, the lack of waste separation was based in a cultural difference. She managed to convince staff members to at least separate the waste along basic lines. “With the money we earned through the waste separation process, says Peña-Muñoz, “we were able to develop the entire waste separation program.” That was when the need to take account of different mentalities dawned on her. Through her studies and work in various countries, she has learned that it is not possible to implement certain concepts in the same way everywhere, which is why she wants to use her company to build a bridge between cultures and develop solutions that suit each respective country.

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