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Cochabamba and La Paz-El Alto”**

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# “Inequality and Access to water in the cities of Cochabamba and La Paz-El Alto”

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The declaration of the **Right to Development** emphasizes development as a “global economic, social, cultural and political process that seeks to constantly improve the population’s well-being based on active, free and significant participation as well as in the fair distribution of the benefits derived from it”. At the end of November 2002, the definition of access to drinking water is multidimensional. For water to be considered accessible it has to be available in “sufficient quantity, accessible price, to be physically accessible, safe and of acceptable quality for personal and domestic use”.

Access to drinking water is a fundamental Human Right. The right to have drinking water is part of the so-called economic, social and cultural rights. This integral vision of human rights constitutes a step in advance. Due to its integral vision, the State and the population become allies in order to generate the mechanisms that guarantee the fulfillment of all the rights in question. Regarding the provision of water services, the State, through its actions, promotes and generates opportunities that provide the “individual the necessary material support to be able to exercise them efficiently.” Therefore, the concept of human rights becomes a politico-economic concept that integrates simultaneously: security in several aspects, the individual's protection, his material well-being, and means to satisfy basic needs. All this supposes a process of enhancement of citizenship allowing people to act upon their rights and civic duties. Therefore, governments should adopt the necessary measures in order to guarantee the right to the drinkable water as well as strategies that allow water access to the poorest and most vulnerable sectors.

It is then useful to approach the topic of access to water from the Human Right to Development standpoint, due to its integral and systemic perspective. It does not impose hierarchies among the diverse and inseparable dimensions of development –democratic, economic, social, environmental, cultural - and it puts them all in function of the growth of human capabilities and freedoms, trying to break the false independence of the economic and the social aspects. An exclusively economist conception is not acceptable, and neither is an idea that promotes a social progress that sacrifices economic advances. In consequence, a good recommendation will be one of accepting integrative economic, social, cultural development policies, with the perspective of the promotion of a “virtuous” dynamics where the mutual influence of factors generates societies with higher rents and more complete and more sophisticated human capabilities (Yáñez César, 2001).

It is praiseworthy to point out that the adopted declaration ascertains that “enough water should not be interpreted in a restricted way by mere reference to water volume and technologies. Water should be treated as a cultural and social asset and not essentially as an economic commodity. This presents a different vision from the decisions taken in several international forums during the 90’s, when water was

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considered as a commodity. It represented a change towards market based policies to show the real cost of water, through the reduction of subsidies and with the involvement of the private sector in the provision of water services”(United Nations, 2003).

Bolivia has become emblematic when referring to water privatization issues. On one hand, the "water war" in Cochabamba is one of the most publicized cases of privatization failures. On the other hand, the case of the "Aguas de Illimani" the La Paz/EI Alto water concession is known for the efforts to correct contract design in order to make the water concession "pro-poor". Efforts that so far have encountered a mild success. This chapter tries to unveil the condition of access to water being experienced by the population of these two cities several years after the reforms affecting the water sector.

Bolivia is a country with high population dynamics. In this context, the identification of the patterns of changing water, land use and the spatial distribution of poverty in La Paz and Cochabamba becomes a relevant challenge to show analyse the conditions under which the privatization process took place. The 'Water War' in Cochabamba during April 2000, showed the world the consequences of the unfair conditions of the processes of privatisation of the basic services in Bolivia. The main problem affecting water services in the country seems to be that there is less control over the companies that offer the service, because water is considered as an economic asset. Frequently the justification of its administrators be they private or public is that the concession areas do not coincide with the boundaries of the cities. It is frequently observed in Bolivia that the concession area only covers the spaces where the economically powerful groups live. Efforts to improve the quality of services being concentrated in the area of the concession deepen the pattern of inequalities and exclusion already existing in the cities.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first part, a brief introduction on the city of Cochabamba is presented, including the characteristics of urban expansion and quality of infrastructure. This part presents the main indicators of state of coverage of water and sanitation services before and after the failed privatization attempt of the public company SEMAPA. It concludes with an analysis of sustainability of the water company based on published financial indicators for recent years. The second part of the paper is devoted to the analysis in the case of the supply water system in La Paz/EI Alto. Different from the Cochabamba case, the concession agreement signed with a private company in La Paz/EI Alto has been pursued. The water supply is in hands of the private consortium Aguas del Illimani. The paper analyses the pattern of urban expansion and quality of infrastructure services. Then, it tries to match current developments in the expansion of the system with the targets set in the concession contract. Once again, financial indicators are shown leading to a reflection on the future sustainability of the company and the implications for the well being of users in the area.

## **PART I: Cochabamba**

### **1.1. The City of Cochabamba**

The City of Cochabamba is called "the city of eternal spring". It is found in the region of the valleys at a height of around 2500 metres above sea level. The City was founded at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century on the foundations of the previous pre-colonial village of *Canata*. Since then it has achieved importance due to the development of agricultural

estates, which had the purpose of supplying food to the mining industry in Potosi (Ledo, 1986; Solares, 1990).

Around five per cent of the Departmental area of Cochabamba is a valley. It is within this "small piece" of the territory that 85 per cent of the Departmental urban population lives and it is within this territory that the city of Cochabamba is found.

### **1.1.1. The Metropolitan area of the city of Cochabamba**

The City has largely increased its weight within the total departmental population. In fact, it represented only seven per cent of that population in 1900, 16.5 per cent in 1950, 28.2 in 1976 and around 37 per cent in the last census in 2001. The central position Cochabamba has with borders with six other departments makes it the perfect place for the confluence of different human groups. In fact, more than half of the inhabitants are immigrants. In many senses Cochabamba is a reflection of Bolivia. It is an intermediate space, which provides a national meeting point where many of the contrasts prevailing in Bolivia can be found. Values of the main indicators for Cochabamba are usually the same as the average value for the country as a whole.

The metropolitan space of Cochabamba encompasses several municipal districts. Municipalities enjoy administrative and managerial autonomy. Municipal realities are dissimilar but taken altogether they represent great economic, social and territorial potential.

### **1.1.2. The Municipal Districts**

Municipal authorities' lack of attention to the basic needs of the population, which lives in the suburbs, is generating important social tensions. The explosive growth of the city and of their surrounding towns has happened within a framework of a lack of political leadership, chaos and improvisation. The progressive expansion of the urban area over previously agricultural areas has created important problems for the urban planning.

Since 1994 the municipal administration has incorporated civil participation and decentralisation as an important element of its planning system, and to that end the city is currently divided into 14 Municipal Districts. The purpose of the Districts is to decentralise municipal activities with respect to construction, health and education, and to establish a context for popular participation in setting priorities. The attempt has proven ineffectual however, since financial resources are not decentralised and Districts have in effect no budget autonomy. Further, Department voice in Strategic Planning initiatives has been extremely limited.

An expression of the latter is that, after the publication in 1995 of District Development Plans, which in theory should have been the instruments for technical and political planning, nothing happened. These plans aimed at guiding the process of territorial organisation. Unfortunately, District Plans were not elaborated following the same methodology so they are not comparable. As a consequence, they can hardly be used as basis for the construction of the strategic vision for the city.

The City Council of Cochabamba issued the bases for the elaboration of the Strategic Plan of Development at the end of 1999, but only in 2002 was published officially. One of the more important aspects in the new document is the strong emphasis on the gender perspective. This aspect is the result of an arduous process of participation and

advocacy of the Institute of Integral Feminine Formation (IFFI), an NGO, to sensitise the municipal authorities.

Disregarding good intentions, the city of Cochabamba is growing fast. Segregation is increasing with respect to the use and ownership of urban spaces. Urban violence is growing, and there is more chaos and lack of urban planning for suburbs. Meanwhile, the municipality continues to invest in the aesthetics of the city, benefiting the residents of the northern (more affluent) part. Meanwhile in the southern (poorer) part people live in a world of dissatisfaction of most basic needs.

### **1.1.3. The urban expansion of the city of Cochabamba**

During the twentieth century the city experienced a systematic demographic increase, increasing its size more than thirty times. This has been due to a high fertility rate but also to migration. For example in 1986, closure of the national mines combined with harsh economic policies resulted in an influx of more than 25,000 immigrants to Cochabamba, and a sectoral and geographical redistribution of the labour force that continued through the second half of the eighties.

The migration to the City of Cochabamba is mainly urban. Nearly three out of four immigrants come from urban zones. The main areas of urban origin are the three Departmental capitals of the Bolivian highlands: Murillo-La Paz, Cercado-Oruro, Frías-Potosí. One must also highlight the return migration and the migration flows to and from the city of Santa Cruz. The explanation of the urban origin of the flow towards Cochabamba is a real challenge; it has to do with the relationship between urban centres and the process of transformation of Bolivian cities in the last decades.

Cochabamba's population growth is unbalanced. There is a high demographic concentration in some neighbourhoods and very low in others. The highest concentration is in the Old City, around the central market place. These areas remain densely populated, despite that the rate of increase of population during the last decade was stagnant. This happens in stark contrast to the high population growth rate in the poorest districts.

The high price of the land in the north-eastern and central zones, which have better services provided by the State, and the increase of commercial activities which has happened in these areas have caused three types of response.

The first consists of the sector strategy for high income groups, to sell downtown properties and build new homes in cheaper zones. This has occurred mainly in the north-eastern zone of the City such as the wealthy districts Las Lomas de Aranjuez, El Mirador, and Villa Moscu.

The second consists of rent-sharing strategies that have been implemented in the large houses of the old city. Residents who sub-divide these properties have the benefit of access to better equipped houses and locations closer to their work.

A third response has been to invade lands in suburban areas close to activity centres such as the central market and the industrial sector of the south. These areas, formerly irrigated agricultural lands, lack basic services and basic urban structures and are characterised by a high level of internal heterogeneity.

These processes carry important consequences on the configuration of the urban landscape and the quality of the urban expansion. The urbanization of irrigated

agricultural lands, which are not intended for the construction of homes or other buildings, increases the vulnerability towards natural disasters of those living there, which are populations of lower incomes. A clear trend towards the increase of internal economic and social heterogeneity is depicted in the actual configuration of the city.

It is evident that a clear element of inequality and discrimination exists in the residential inter-urban space of Cochabamba; the place where the population establishes itself is an indicator of the social differentiation processes. There are important differences in terms of poverty and of unsatisfied basic needs which permit one to demonstrate the existence of segregation processes in the use and property of space.

These serious problems must raise the awareness of municipal authorities about the need to make conscious efforts to implement policies to achieve an ordered urban growth. It is also necessary that those in charge make serious proposals to provide for the basic needs of the population, rather than just plans that never get implemented. Also, the continuous expansion of the city, using the fertile agricultural lands in the valley to build houses puts the agricultural tradition and the livelihoods of many people at risk.

Productive activities, social institutions and ideological perspectives shape the configuration of the territory. Different styles of work organisation, technological means, judicial and political norms, cultural values and other elements which structure a society influence territorial parameters which determine specific ways of using the space. This way, one can say that the social demographic manifestations of the differences in geographical distribution of the population are not mere territorial issues. They obey structural rules, which respond to a combination of multiple factors including historical determinants.

## **1.2. Urban infrastructure and residential areas**

One of the connotations of the city is the way the process of the reproduction of the labour force unfolds. This is a specific characteristic of the mechanisms of social appropriation of space. One expression of the said processes, in its daily and simple variant, corresponds to the situation of the households vis-à-vis collective consumption. This dimension refers to the degree of satisfaction of the minimal requirements associated with the subsistence of populations and how meeting them involves the whole of the social group inhabiting a given space (Castells, Manuel, 1977; Lojkin, Jean, 1981; Quijano, Singer: 1976).

One sees here something specific to the city, for, in order to meet the consumption demands of the whole, there needs to be organised intervention by the community. This supposes that the State plays an active role. For, in contrast to the countryside, in the urban setting, it is necessary to share the costs and benefits derived from the supply of certain elements that cannot be left to just to the arbitrariness of the forces of nature or the market. Given that they are areas that have been built up - at least in theory - for life together with others, cities require a joint process of decision making so as to ensure the provision of a whole series of elements. Two such elements are clean water and sanitation and should - in theory - be available to all urban dwellers. In fact, the availability (or not) of these services is part of the mechanisms that establish the differences in the appropriation of the social product. So, in the current situation, despite that everybody contributes in one way or another to pay for the costs, just a few reap the benefits, or those who benefit from them are far fewer than is fair.

Given scarce resources, the intervention of the State tends to be limited and to favour certain groups to the detriment of others. But, even if the City had water and sewerage network that covered its entirety, for each household there would still exist the issue of being connected (being able to pay for the connection) to that network and so to partake of the common benefits.

### 1.2.1. *Social inequality in the access to the drinking water in Cochabamba: SEMAPA before and after the Concession*

The Municipality of Cochabamba is responsible for providing basic services to the population. It provides potable water and sanitary services through SEMAPA. SEMAPA was created through the DS (Supreme Decree) 08048 on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1967. It was reorganized by the DS 10597 of November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1972 and given administrative and financial autonomy. On August 25<sup>th</sup> of 1997, according to the DS 24828, SEMAPA was recognized as a decentralized company of the Honorable Municipal Governorship of Cercado. The responsibility for the provision of services included all the metropolitan area. After a brief and convulsive period (from 1999 to 2000) when SEMAPA was run as a private company, it is now back again as a public utility. The so-called 'water war' in 2000 that put an end to the concession agreement with a private provider, marks SEMAPA's return to be a public service entity.

Table 1: Neighborhood of residence according to Number of Connections, Water consumption per family and per member (day), size of household, monthly income, price of water, percentage of income spent on water, and infant mortality, 1996

Description	Neighborhood			Total
	Good	Regular	Bad	
Number of Connections				
Cases	18695	19884	7688	46267
Domestic	16249	18663	7552	42464
No Domestic	2446	1221	136	3803
Per cent of Consumption				
Domestic	45%	38%	17%	100%
No Domestic	59%	36%	5%	100%
Total	48%	38%	14%	100%
Domestic consumption daily liters				
For family	731	430	125	429
For person	165	99	22	95
Size of Household	4.4	4.4	5.7	4.8
Income Bs. Month	2500	814	576	1130
Price of Water	26.09	26.01	39.23	30.4
% of income to pay water	1%	3%	7%	3%

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