

Capitalization of experiences «Water, Land and People»

The Water Context in Bolivia

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THE WATER CONTEXT IN BOLIVIA

During the past years the global agenda has included the water problem and its consequences as an issue of increasing priority. Bolivia has not only been involved in this agenda, but it has also set the path and supported the construction of a more social vision for water resource management, especially in attempting to break the commercial criteria, which considers water as a scarce and economic good that is subject to a market logic.

Bolivian waters feed three large basins: the Amazon basin (66% of the territory), which through the Madera River drains 95% of the water in the country; the Plata basin (21% of the territory); and the *Cerrada* or Lacustrian basin (13% of the territory), which revolves around Lakes Titicaca and Poopó, and its rivers in Bolivia as well as in Peru. The predominant areas are the Andean highlands area (altiplano), the inter Andean valleys, and the flat lands. The first two represent around a third part of the country's total surface (1,098,581 Km²) but provide the living environment of three out of every four of the approximately ten million Bolivians. It is the area where the use of water is a high priority due to its restricted access (rights, use), temporary availability (3 to 4 months of rain), shortage (250 - 400 mm of rain) or demand (irrigation, drinking water, industry).

In spite of the regulatory progress, mainly at a sector (e.g. the Irrigation Law), and institutional level (e.g. creation of the Water Ministry), the formal regulatory and institutional situation of water in Bolivia is still weak, incomplete, non-existent or outdated (e.g. Water Law of 1906, lack of water authority, lack of an integral regulatory frame that comprises the multiple uses of water, etc.). Therefore, at local level traditional regulatory practices prevail for water access and management based on customs and usage (customary rules or positive rights), that coexist with the formal rights, and are supported by ancient structures, or recent ones, but socially accepted or imposed.

Between 80 and 85% of water use in Bolivia is for irrigation purposes (ECLAC, 1998; Van Damme, 2002). This sector confronts most of the intra and inters sector problems, specially in those places where the availability of water is worsening due to water shortage and inefficient management. Local and institutional efforts are multiplied in order to make progress towards an Integrated Water Management that encourages sustainability and local governance, and a more fair and balanced water access, within a framework of consensus between the multiple actors involved.

The search for alternatives for the construction of an integrated water management at a local level has encouraged the learning group to study the ***Tiquipaya case***, municipality in the Department of Cochabamba (its capital was the scenario for the "Water War" in year 2000), which is where one can observe contrasts between draught and floods related to low water and heavy rain periods; coexistence of prevailing traditional models, as well as the formal and institutional models for access and management of the recourse; and also the constant struggle between an accelerated development process and the peasants' efforts to avoid the changes on the current land use. All these actions have turned this area in a privileged and representative work area for several institutions that work there in their own ways and under their own vision to create concepts, which at present are not commonly accepted, of Integrated Water Management and Integrated Watershed Management.



On the other hand, the search for governance in a scenario of government weakness has created greater disposition from the State administrators to take care of the demands of social organizations or movements, mainly peasant and indigenous, which many times under the threat of further conflicts have opened the space for consensus or participation (sort of formal, legitimate or valid). The changes achieved, such as the Irrigation Law, the establishment of social structures such as ANARESCAPYS (National Association of Irrigators and Community Water and Sanitation Systems - *Asociación Nacional de Regantes y Sistemas Comunitarios de Agua Potable y Saneamiento*), or spaces for consensus building such as CONIAG (Interinstitutional Water Council in Bolivia - *Consejo Interinstitucional del Agua en Bolivia*) were originated in the above-mentioned scenario. Therefore, the construction process of this sector's regulation (Law for the Promotion and Support to the Irrigation Sector for Agricultural and Forestry Production - *Ley de Promoción y Apoyo al Sector Riego para la Producción Agropecuaria y Forestal*, **Law Nº 2878** dated October 8, 2004) has been considered as a priority for analysis and reflection within the learning group.



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