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Changing practices, policies and consciences for water sustainability: the case of civil society initiatives in Guatemala and El Salvador

The paper illustrates two recent cases for the defence of policies towards sustainable development in terms of basic rights and freedoms for the most vulnerable people in El Salvador and Guatemala, Central America (2006-2009). It focuses on these two cases to evidence how the power structures visible and invisible from public and private spheres clash with the efforts of civil society to put forward public policy proposals to defend their human right to access clean water and thereby protecting their habitat and resources in a sustainable manner. In doing so, by focusing on the particular aid chain role of Oxfam International and its national NGO partner organizations in these two countries, it explains how the interaction of development agents (government, private corporations, social movements and the international aid cooperation chain) affect people's valuable beings and doings from a foucauldian and gramscian perspective in combination with Amartya Sen's capability approach and development ethics. It evidences the need for structural development policies like education and other streamlines of action to actually change the concept of sustainable development from individual to collective agencies as a whole within the region in a context of asymmetric power relations.

Introduction

Changing practices, policies and consciences for water sustainability: the case of civil society initiatives in Guatemala and El Salvador (about 20 pages)			
1. Introduction	a) Research Question	<p>The Unjust situation: Broad figures about El Salvador and Guatemala in terms of right to water violations, what is happening right now, a snapshot.</p> <p><i>What stops people in El Salvador and Guatemala from the freedom and right to access clean water?</i></p> <p>How do power structures contribute to this unjust situation?</p> <p>How has civil society in El Salvador</p>	1 p.

DRAFT 0.0 - Unfinished version

		and Guatemala tried to change this situation? How successful have their efforts been? Why?	
2. Power, freedom and human right to water	<p>b) Power structures and the right to eg. water</p> <p>a. combination with practice and <u>theory</u></p>	<p>Power, Agency, capabilities, the grid aquella de Robeyns!! Positive vs. negative freedom</p> <p>Agents of structure, a maze of power chains AIM, Gov, Enterprises...</p> <p><i>Agents of change, immersed in power chains</i> Cooperation chain, NGOs, Soc. Movements</p>	2+2= 4 páginas
3. The Context	<p>c) The situation of the power structure and the right to water in Guatemala and El Salvador</p>	<p>In El Salvador, <i>The power structure</i> <i>The right to water</i></p> <p>In Guatemala <i>The power structure</i> <i>The right to water</i></p>	4 páginas
4. The actions	d) The development ethics approach to development	The rights based approach of Oxfam The structure of civil society's actors	1 p.
	e) In El Salvador	ACUA, CDC, Foro del Agua,	4 p.
	f) In Guatemala	MadreSelva, mesa minería	4 p
5. The Results, the lessons	g) Need for structural development policies to change practices, consciences	So long to islands and archipiélagos de desarrollo Education From individual to collective agencies The role of power and capabilities and rights (integral views)	1.5 p

DRAFT 0.0 - Unfinished version

“The river gave her everything, it was her life
The river refused to take orders, it went to the sea
it went to the sea...
(...)
She was in love with the river
The old woman lived the verb love
And she saw how her life went to the sea
It went to the sea
(...)
That old woman was the witness
On how that river was drying up without complaining
(...)
And up there in the mountain the green died
Its clean waters blackened
And now without water, why live”

*fragments from song lyrics “In love with the river” (Conde, 2008),
by Oscar Conde, Guatemalan musician and coordinator of
Colectivo MadreSelva*

Introduction

One snapshot: In El Salvador, the lack of access to clean water is no news at all, may be this is why a poor woman called Ileana García, in her forties living with her three children in the neighbourhood of El Calvario, Olocuilta (La Paz) says that she has already become, without ever planning to be one, “an expert in water management”. She tells the journalists that interview her that she has advanced “to that level” due to the problem she and other 150 families suffer every month in her community: the lack of water. The problem is that when she gets it, it is not even suitable for human consumption. “Almost every month we have to go out and protest in the Comalapa road (the one that connects to the International Airport of El Salvador) because no one gives us any solutions. Water is a vital resource and we need it.(...) We have to go and fetch water to the well because it doesn’t come here and that water...well you cannot drink it just like that. What we have to do, this is what the health unit has told us, is to boil it and then put some drops of bleach so that it gets more pure”(Portillo et al., 2006)

Second snapshot: In Guatemala, the main newspaper Prensa Libre shows the picture of some indigenous women carrying all sorts of plastic containers for water probably searching for water, they look tired, they are also carrying their babies...and the excerpt that says “People from various communities of Chimaltenango are obliged to buy water, because it doesn’t reach their homes. (...) Chimaltenango has 755 systems of pipe water, from which, 365 are contaminated with feces, garbage and sewage. These water sources

DRAFT 0.0 - Unfinished version

are the supply for more than 60 thousand families in the 16 municipalities, whose inhabitants are in risk of acquiring some sickness.”(Prensa Libre, 2009)

Snapshots like these portray one of the many faces of poverty in Guatemala, El Salvador and Latin America as a whole. Not having access to water and, on top of that, not accessing it within minimum standards for human consumption is no less than ironical in Latin America, as it receives the highest annual rainfall of any region in the world. So water access is not really a debate on *water availability* but rather a problem of equal *distribution* and *management*. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) concluded in its year 2006 human development report (HDR): *"The scarcity at the heart of the global water crisis is rooted in power, poverty and inequality, not in physical availability."* (UNDP, 2006:2)

The key problem with Latin America is that with an average Gini coefficient of 0.52 it stands out as one of the most unequal regions in the world in terms of income and this affects all human relations in different scales. (López and Perry, 2008). So, in other words inequality in access to clean water happens in a region where economic power is really badly distributed, in a place where “the richest 10 per cent of the population captures 40 per cent of total income, while the poorest 10 per cent receives a mere 1 per cent,” (UN, 2008). Ironically again, the poorest people not only get access to less water, and to less clean water, but they also pay some of the world’s highest prices: inequitable water pricing has perverse consequences for household poverty. For example, the poorest 20% of households in El Salvador, Jamaica and Nicaragua spend on average more than 10% of their household income on water. In contrast, in the United Kingdom a 3% threshold is seen as an indicator of hardship.(UNDP, 2006:7)

So being poor in Latin America is also a dictum of water injustice: the poorer you are, the more you pay in relative terms for water, and the harder it is for you to access it and to have it in decent enough sanitation quality. Why is that? What stops poor people in Latin America, and more specifically in El Salvador and Guatemala from the freedom and right to access clean water? How do power structures within these countries contribute to this unjust situation? How has civil society in El Salvador and Guatemala tried to change this situation? How successful have their efforts been? Why? This paper is an attempt to construct some initial answers to these questions, with a narrative built in from the practice and ongoing experience of two development projects supported by Oxfam Solidarity Belgium in Guatemala and El Salvador.

Power, freedom and the human right to water

DRAFT 0.0 - Unfinished version

As the UNDP stated in his year 2006 HDR, injustice in water access and proper water sanitation for the most poor in the planet stems out of the *matrix of power relations* they are immersed in. This invisible matrix acts in practice as a “social jail” of rules or forces that limit and distort, like gravity, the available freedom of opportunities that people experience. Take for instance, the terrible experience of thirst, dehydration or sickness provoked by lack of water access or water without the minimum sanitation putting life at risk... are the most poor and vulnerable people in Guatemala and El Salvador *capable* of avoiding this? If not, why not? What kinds of forces *around* and *within* them shape their destiny as one where they are almost certain to experience deprivation and exclusion from clean sources of water throughout their lives?

In order to explain this invisible realm of power relations that produce these outcomes in development of the poor in a distinctive and explicative manner, we can frame our discussion by setting a theoretical framework suitable enough for examining the interrelationship between power, freedom, rights and capabilities in the case of water access.

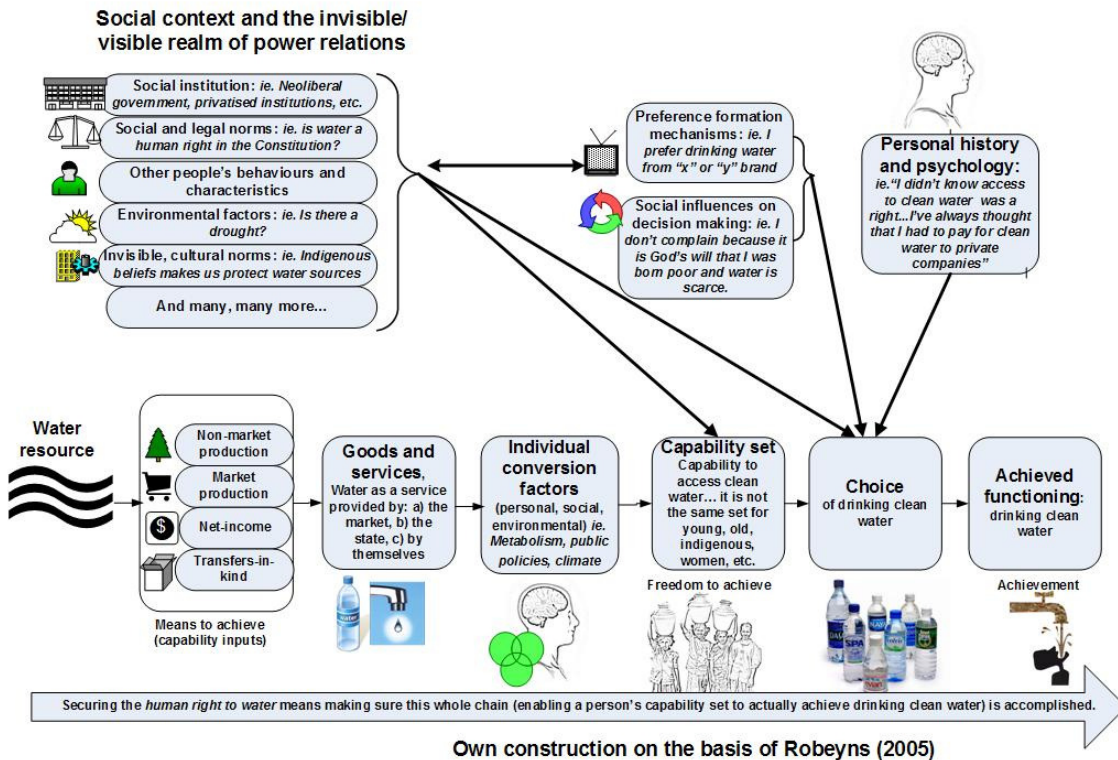
To do this, we may use primarily the toolbox of notions on freedom, agency, and capabilities given by the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2000, Nussbaum and Sen, 1999, Sen, 2001, Sen, 1992) as it is a space capable of being enriched with notions of justice given by the rights based approach (Vizard, 2007). Secondly, this *capability-human rights approach* framework may be complemented with the notions of power, empowerment and agency as in (Foucault et al., 2000, Hill, 2003, Tobias, 2005) and networks of discourse as in (Peet, 2002).

The capability-human right approach chain

Water enables life and human beings can only “function” well and live if they actually achieve drinking uncontaminated water. This fact may mark the start of our analysis. Using Robeyns (2005) as our first building block, let us focus in figure 1, to examine how a person’s capability to access clean water and actually achieve drinking it, depends on various types of forces that shape her social and personal context. These forces are the ones that will give the degrees of freedom either to enable or disable that capability to actually drink uncontaminated water.

Figure 1

A stylized non-dynamic representation of a person's capability set to access clean water and her social and personal context



In essence, what this sequence tries to portray is that if a human being in order to function needs to access clean water, the *achieved functioning* of that basic need would be actually drinking clean water. Yet in order to get to this point, many determinants or forces in social reality have to occur. For instance, if Ileana, our Salvadorian woman and “water management expert” in our opening lines, goes out to protest in the streets almost every month for her lack of access to water there we have an indicator of where she is in this capability human-rights framework: it means that even though she might have her *means to achieve* the service in terms of net-income (capability input), the poor service provided by the Salvadorian government does not secure her the capability, nor the choice to actually achieve drinking clean water. She may be even paying for this essential service, but when it does come it may still not enable her to consume it because it is contaminated:

“We have to go and fetch water to the well because it doesn't come here and that water...well you cannot drink it just like that. What we have to do, this is what the health

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unit has told us, is to boil it and then put some drops of bleach so that it gets more pure”(Portillo, et al., 2006)

Conversely, she does say that *she knows how to purify it* so although institution “A”: ANDA, the governmental institution responsible of providing water, *should have* provided this service as a right, and although neglected at this level, she on the other has used a combination of her individual conversion factors (eg. her intelligence and ability to read) and the positive influence of institution “B”: the health unit to actually purify that water by herself to enable her capability to drink that water when it is provided and hence, achieving her functioning of drinking clean water, not just to herself but together with her three children.

In other words, the person’s own personal history and psychology and her individual conversion factors amplified or diminished her capability set to actually achieve drinking uncontaminated water. The sum of all these factors, forces, her context and power relations in which she is immersed all add up to “construct” her own capability to achieve this. It would not have been the same story for an old illiterate indigenous woman in Guatemala in her seventies to actually be able to protest in the streets for her lack of water and then understand and comply with the instructions on how to be able to purify the water, when she actually gets it.

The human right to water as point zero in the capabilities framework

Another important item in this analysis, is the notion that the human right to water in the capability framework would actually mean securing and observing that *the whole sequence of factors and events* needed to enable a person to achieve drinking clean water should be secured. A right to water necessarily refers to advancing a basic ideal of human flourishing and in so doing it converts itself in a very useful instrument of advocacy for justice in development ethics (Vizard, 2007:247). In other words, the moral quest for securing potable water to human beings would necessarily mean examining what affects the whole path of factors, the institutional arrangements, social and legal norms of that certain society going from left to right, water resource→capability inputs to capabilities→achieved functionings.

[A] focus on capabilities, although closely allied with the human rights approach, adds an important clarification to the idea of human rights: for it informs us that our goal is not merely “negative liberty” or absence of interfering state action—one very common understanding of the notion of rights—but, instead, the full ability of people to be and to choose these very important things.

(Nussbaum, 2004:13 quoted in (Vizard, 2007:246)

DRAFT 0.0 - Unfinished version

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the body of independent experts established to monitor the implementation of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, elaborated the content and obligations attached to the right to water in its General Comment No.15, “*The right to water*” (articles 11 and 12 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*). The Committee defined the right to water as follows (OHCHR, 2009):

The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

Whereby:

The right to water contains both freedoms and entitlements. The freedoms include the right to maintain access to existing water supplies necessary for the right to water, and the right to be free from interference, such as the right to be free from arbitrary disconnections or contamination of water supplies. By contrast, the entitlements include the right to a system of water supply and management that provides equality of opportunity for people to enjoy the right to water.

Hence, point “zero” of all institutional arrangements in society should provide the right to water as it is termed above, plus securing that human beings have the freedom or capabilities to ensure this right and convert it into something they enjoy. Why is this important? In power relations this is all the more important for defending the chain of changes that should happen in order to fulfill the right to human water in people’s lives:

“This is not a semantic issue. If we can determine that water is a right, it gives citizens a tool they can use against their governments,(...) If you believe it is a human right, then you believe that you can't refuse to give it to someone because they can't afford it,” Maude Barlow, a senior adviser on water issues to the president of the UN General Assembly.(Christian Science Monitor, 2009)

The beauty of the capabilities-human rights framework is that it allows us to concentrate on the *inner and outer* forces that shape a human being’s capabilities, and therefore, its opportunities or freedoms to accomplish the achieved functioning of drinking clean water. Institutional arrangements, social and legal norms, other people’s behaviours and characteristics, invisible cultural norms, etcetera, all provide the context, the structural *matrix of power* in which a human being is immersed when elaborating its set of freedoms to do and to be what he/she values.

Thus, within our framework, capabilities as basic indicators of opportunity are the key pillar of it all, because observing from the capabilities birds-eye view and focusing on how they are “constructed” to expand or contract a person’s freedom to actually achieve

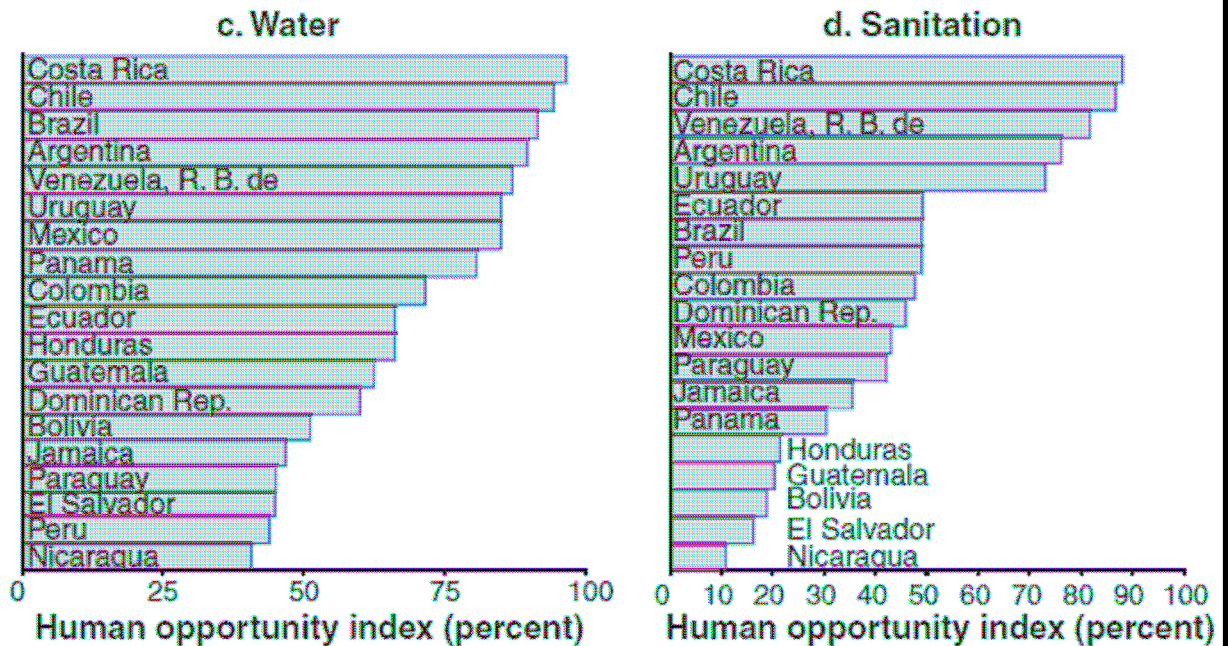
what/he she has reason to value, tell us a lot about the power relations in that person's society.

For example, the World Bank thinking in these types of issues has recently created the Human Opportunity Index (HOI), which intends to synthesize into a single indicator measurements of both the level of basic opportunities in a society and how equitably those opportunities are distributed focusing on children as the target of analysis. (Paes de Barros et al., 2009:8) The higher the HOI in water access, means the higher basic opportunities and more equitable distribution they have in terms water access.

Examining the HOI on access to water in selected countries, the World Bank found out that the children with the most precarious and narrow opportunities to access water from the cradle to adulthood in Latin America were Jamaica, Nicaragua, Peru, El Salvador, and Paraguay lagging below the 50 percent mark, while Costa Rica, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina were found as the ones that offer the most opportunities in this field, with marks above 90 percent.

Similarly, the HOI for water sanitation was found to be considerably low for Guatemala and El Salvador, both under the 30 percent mark, reflecting considerable narrow opportunities in this field whereby the children in both Central American countries have considerable low chances to overcome the poorly sanitized water.

Figure 2



Source: (Paes de Barros, et al., 2009:8)

The issue of power

Power, in its Foucaultian understanding is permanently produced and disseminated ‘*all around us*’ (Foucault, 1974, 1978, 1979) by the systems of meaning that flow from our social practices. If development discourses are the manifestations of these flows, it is clear that they may be used as a ‘*weapon of choice*’ to influence behaviour in the ideological struggles of society (Fairclough, 2001).

AIM complexes as means for the construction of hegemony

A *hegemonic Academic-Institutional Media (AIM) complex* is basically a network of ‘centres of persuasion’ (prestigious institutions, public personalities, the media, etc) that united by a dominant overarching ideology coherently enact and disseminate discourses to lock-in their own privileged interests in a certain status quo. (Peet, 2002) These centres of persuasion or ‘*factories of discourse*’ represent the voices of the elite in its many forms (academic, economic, institutional, cultural) as an orchestrated ‘chorus’ or *composite structure*¹ (See table 2.4).

A classic example of an AIM complex is precisely the network of academic institutions, public personalities and media resources that helped to make *neo-liberalism* today’s global hegemonic ideology. A vast array of scholars have evidenced how this ideological hegemony was achieved by centres of persuasion generating and disseminating discourses loaded with narrative storylines, rhetorical uses of language, and semiotic inseminations of ‘scientific’ and prescriptive knowledge². These included the back-up of: a) *prestigious academic communities* like Friederich Hayek’s Austrian School of Economics in Vienna; Milton Friedman’s Chicago “Boys” of Chicago University or the London School of Economics; b) *powerful institutions* like the American Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institute, American Enterprise Institute; c) *public personalities*: the US president, Ronald Reagan, the UK prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and d) *dominant media networks* like the main newspapers, TV and radio stations.

¹ Originating from Gramsci Gramsci, Antonio. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers., the notion of ‘complex’ acknowledges the heterogeneity of discourses and social actors fighting for the same ideology with different angles and approaches.

² For example see Harvey Harvey, David. (2003) *The New Imperialism*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, ———. (2006) Neo-Liberalism as Creative Destruction. *Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography* 88 B 145-58., Peet Peet, Richard. (2002) Ideology, Discourse, and the Geography of Hegemony: From Socialist to Neoliberal Development in Postapartheid South Africa. *Antipode* 34:54-84, ———. (2003) *Unholy Trinity : The Imf, World Bank and Wto*. London: Zed Books., Chomsky Chomsky, Noam. (2004) *Hegemony or Survival : America’s Quest for Global Dominance*. London: Penguin Books, Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. (2002) *Manufacturing Consent : The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York, N.Y. : Pantheon Books, Chomsky, Noam. (1997) *Democracy in a Neoliberal Order : Doctrines and Reality*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Figure XX

AIM COMPLEX AS A COMPOSITE SET OF FACTORIES OF DISCOURSE		
<p>[A]: Academic activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Scientific Knowledge discourse</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ scholars from elite institutions, (Knowledge elite) ▪ ie. leading universities with great capital resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic papers, books, reports, articles ▪ speeches, conferences, ▪ expert interviews, policy prescriptions, ▪ academic blogs and websites
<p>[I]: Institutional, Economic practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Business discourse</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ economic agents and institutions of business and financial elites (Economic elite) ▪ i.e. business federations, chambers of commerce, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dominant media networks ▪ entrepreneurial language, ▪ narratives of business sections in newspapers, ▪ interviews, commentary shows, etc.
<p>[M]: Communications practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Cultural discourse</i> 	<p>(Media elite)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ie. dominant networks of newspapers, radio, television, internet, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ written, visual or multimedia language communications, ▪ editorials, interviews, articles, music, pictures, etc.

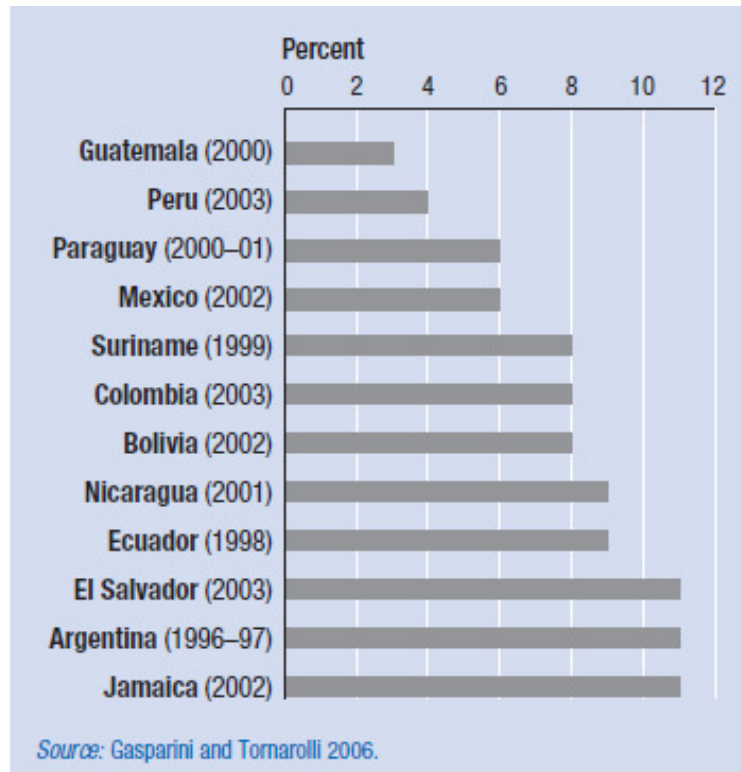
Source: Own construction on the basis of Peet (2002: 58)

AIM complexes determine with their discourses the deliberative struggles that arise when advocating, designing, or implementing a certain policy. (Fischer, 1995, 2003) In this way, with their discursive power at work, they filter, foster and mould particular sets of policies or marginalize and stop others in the development agenda. For example, the policy of free trade is one such an example of an AIM complex at work, shaping the policy-making process, at everyone of its different *discursive phases* of technical-analytical, contextual, systemic, and ideological nature.

The case of El Salvador and Guatemala: the clash of power structures and civil society over the human right to water

Paying the price for poverty: water takes a large share of household spending for the poorest 20%. Evidence for Latin America has found that the poorest 20% of households in Argentina, El Salvador, Jamaica and Nicaragua allocate more than 10% of their spending to water. About half of these households live below the \$1 a day threshold for extreme poverty (see figure XX)

(figure XX).



(UNDP, 2006:51)

This is largely a reflection of the Latin American phenomena of inequality. Poor people in Central America are getting tired of having water problems in terms of access, quality and quantity of this vital resource, where the region's citizens are increasingly joining together to react to this injustice and trying to convert all that frustration into action.

"People suffering the most from the water and sanitation crisis -- poor people in general and poor women in particular -- often lack the political voice needed to assert their claims to water." (UNDP, 2006:51) Yet what is important to take into account, is that power exerted over people in terms of a fatal lack of water to some, and plenty of this resource to others has also created resistance in a Foucaultian sense: the water movements brewing in Latin America are beginning to make their collective political voice heard. (Beeson, 2008) Let us see what is happening in El Salvador and Guatemala in the following section.

The Case of Guatemala

In Sololá, the most affected areas are the departamental head, Nahualá, Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán and Santa Lucía Utatlán. According to a study, these communities lost in 2008 more than 20 millimeters of rain per year, as a consequence of the destruction of water

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zones. In those municipalities, if the resource is kept given a bad management, the subterranean water reserves will only last to supply water until the year 2022.(Prensa Libre, 2009)

De acuerdo con información del Instituto de Fomento Municipal, en Guatemala cerca de 7.5 millones de personas no tienen acceso a agua entubada.(Estrada Tobar, 2009)

Poco tratamiento

En Quetzaltenango, solo Orintepeque, San Miguel Sigüilá y La Esperanza tienen plantas de tratamiento de aguas servidas.

En Xelajú, a diario se desechan al río Samalá 23 metros cúbicos de agua contaminada.

Desechos sólidos, residuos químicos y materiales orgánicos son lanzados a las riberas de ríos, y luego el agua es utilizada para consumo humano. El problema radica en que no cuentan con sistemas de tratamiento, y la contaminación llega hasta los mares.

Para que las personas que reciben el servicio en casa consuman agua menos contaminada, algunas comunas disponen de sistemas de cloración, pero en muchos casos éstos son manuales, y la cantidad de químico que se aplica no es la adecuada, o no funcionan los cloradores.

La escasez del agua y la falta de sistemas de captación y distribución en los departamentos obliga a que muchos vecinos caminen largos trechos para abastecerse en ríos o chorros públicos.

Desperdicio

Algunos residentes que cuentan con servicio domiciliario hacen mal uso del agua y la desperdician al lavar vehículos con frecuencia y regar las calles, entre otras actividades.

Municipalidades y distintas organizaciones impulsan campañas de concienciación para evitar esas prácticas. Sin embargo, parecen no tener mucho eco.

In El Salvador and Guatemala, two out of three infants and teenagers do not have access to clean water because of poor sanitation infrastructure.

The Case of El Salvador

Conclusions

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