GOBERNABILITY PROBLEMS WITH THE SUPPLY OF WATER IN THE RURAL COMMUNITIES OF GUATEMALA AND THE TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT ROL

(Case: San Antonio Sacatepéquez, San Marcos)

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SUMMARY: the governability problems of the water in Guatemala are effect of the social economical structure, also for the lack of a national law of waters, lack of policies, scarce plans and financial resources, as well as unstable institutions in the sector. In the township of San Antonio Sacatepéquez, the governability problems are expressed in the unevenness of treatment between the rural and urban population, irregular service, arbitrary fees, different rulings, inequity in the right to the service for ethnic or gender reasons, profit around water, social conflicts for the sources of water ownership, ignorance of duties and local practices, etc. Facing these problems the township government starts directing the water management through its township water unit, along this it is strengthen the community organizations and their management abilities, techniques, and policies, (auditing and incidence). Along with other local actors begins to work, micro- measuring, drinkable, permanent treatment service of water served in an integrated management perspective of the water source, the last one an outstanding fact.

INTRODUCTION

Guatemala is a country of 108 square kilometers of territory, a population of 13 million of inhabitants, of which a 65% are indigenous Maya, organized administratively in 333 townships, that crow 32,000 rural communities. The 2.5% of the population owns the 67% of the productive land and as consequence assume the right of ownership and possession of the water source with a recent history of an internal armed conflict (1960-1996) and with levels of poverty that reach a 68%, and 16% of those reach extreme poverty. Regarding water and sanitation; 44% of the rural population lack the service of drinking water and 64% lacks a sewage system. Only 10 townships have chlorine systems in the whole country. I part the lack of attention to water and sanitation has provoked the gastrointestinal diseases which are cause of sickness and death in general, with greater impacts in the population of children under 5 years old.

Regarding the water institutionalization, there is no national law of waters, the institutional leadership depends of the government in turn interests, who define their own policies, plans, and budgets, by the way these are limited and conditions by particular interests. On the other hand, the township governments have only worried of the supply for the urban centers.

In the case of San Antonio Sacatepéquez is particular, until the year 2002, of its 22 communities, 11 had piped water, the other 50% of the population, without this service. The monthly fees are 5 cents of a US dollar to 14 US dollars, without measurement, without a drinking system, despite of the analysis made showed bacteria and physic-chemical pollution. The township in response to the service of water in the urban area subsidizes still, since the urban fee is only half a dollar. From the ethnic and gender perspective, the women without access to home connection, in great part as consequence of their organized participation in the decision making.

TOWNSHIP AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE REGARDING THE SUPPLY OF DRINKING WATER IN THE RURAL AREA

The committee for water of the village San Rafael Sacatepéquez after 35 years of procedures to build a water system with state institutions, goes to and NGO to ask for support for the construction of a water system, which pretended to benefit 420 families, (2646 people) and for this had a perforated well. The first action was to make a counting, which gave as a result that the families increased to 467 (3000 people). The first work meeting was to analyze why not were not included 47 families, and the conclusion was that they were the poorest, and could not give their economical contribution to buy the land where the well was perforated, nor labor force, nor other contribution to support the committee expenditures.

The water committee convoke at the local level, did not have the capacity to convoke other actors in the community (auxiliary, promoters, school, health center, church,) neither could relate to the township government. At this time it was enacted the law of development councils (decree 12-2002) with which the central government established an organization and participation system for the community, which was a mechanism to join the civil society to the township. This made the committee to direct their management of the water project, but it would incorporate to the community council of development (COCODE) and this at the same time, to the municipal development council (COMUDE), in this way they were obtaining the support and back up for the municipal government, besides with the antecedents of internal war in the zone and people's fear, it was necessary to create an institution for the organization and participation.

Parting from the previous, the organization structure to put the Project into practice were allowing more women participation, or better yet women were gaining more space of participation; for example, three women incorporated to the water committee, 2 women joined the COCODE and one participated in the COMUDE, at the beginning their participation was minimal quantitatively and more yet in qualitative terms, however it increased progressively. After the project ended, besides the mentioned spaces, women integrated a commission of safety for the service and also incorporated as plumbers in the sector, 14 of them collect the fees in their sectors, furthermore, two of them are integrated to the man- community which an organization of the watershed inter-municipal.

Product of the organized action of this community joined to the initiative of other communities was achieved that the municipal government joined the building of 9 new water systems and 4 communities with expansions in which this government has provided an estimated 9 millions of quetzals (1million 100 thousand dollars). On the other had the municipal government is involved in the construction of waste treatment system and black waters (sinks, sewages of low diameter and conventional sewages). More important yet, is the municipal commitment with the management of the service, since now has opened the Municipal Water Unit which develops policies, rules and plans for the regulation of the water service and the management of the resource in the township.

Regarding the drinkable of the service, again were made analysis of quality of the water and were detected pollutants bacteria and physic-chemical, about this topic there were work meetings with leaders and other local actors joined to health (auxiliary, promoters, midwives, technicians from the health site and teachers) and it was achieved the understanding of the health implications, but at the same time, make a decision to start putting chlorine on the water in 3 communities, these communities did not achieve to do this immediately due to the opposition of the people, with the argument that chlorine gave bad smell to the water and there existed a series of rumors for its use, for example; infertility in women. After various meetings of work and sensitize, the community people decided to install the chlorine in their water system, supervising carefully the doses. This practice continued in the communities but emerges the problem of the cost of the chlorine, for this reason the township hall bought a machine producer of chlorine based on salt, which is the one used now in the communities even in the urban area. Township, community and other actors continue planning the chlorination of other systems.

The measuring as well as chlorine uses is other challenge for the organizations of water management and municipal governments, until now only two communities with water systems with pump (one electric and the other with gas) have decided to use measuring.

These decisions have been taken in assembly, because the water consumption has direct relation with the payment of electricity and this at the same time, increases the fee considerably. A leader about the measuring expresses "when we did not have measure everyone used as he/she pleased, even to spill on the street, even when in some sectors didn't have water. Now with the measure, everyone uses less and everyone has water permanently". The practice of these measures have also been difficult, since it is related with the privatization of the water service, since in the same department the mining enterprises have exploited and deteriorated this resource.

The lack of lawful certainty in the ownership of the sources have been a problem that generates many conflicts among the community people, communities, and townships, leaders and municipal

government. Many of the communities have their source only in possession, others have a simple paper in Spanish, and very few have a document written by a lawyer. In the meetings, have agreed to respect agreements and sale-buy oral and written, but the recommendations is to do it with the specific authorities, since the scarcity of this resource provokes more conflicts.

Recent studies have shown that even when this service is precarious, there are families that have two or more connections "The community San Isidro Ixcolochil, has for example five water systems built by government institutions, NGOs and other international organizations. In some cases not all the connections work, in others, the same community people have started to make money with the connections. In the community Santa Irene they are asking for 8000 quetzals (a thousand dollars) for the right to have a dwelling connection. In other communities, the same leaders are selling this right. This has obligated to make a regulation for municipal water that has been enacted with the support of the leaders of the management organizations, in spite of the position of negative leaders that at some time make money with this service.

Due to the scarcity of water, the decreasing of flow in the systems for gravity or the decrease of water in the well, authorities and community have understood that it is not only a matter of putting water into pipes and take it to houses, now they have to work for this resource, they have incorporated in their rules important elements oriented to the preservation of it, also have incorporated an organization of management for the watershed in the township and region, since this town is located in the Naranjo river and Tacana watershed. This undoubtedly, implies a new culture and behavior for everyone in the zone, which requires joining more the people and local actors in the town and region.

They have begun thinking and acting within a perspective of integrated management of the water resource, this is incipient; they are working in the treatment of served waters with different technology, waste treatment, and reforestation. Regarding this topics it is interesting in the realization of technical studies in the zone. In fact it has began studies done by the national university, Danish cooperation, Solar Foundation, among many others. Parallel it is continue discussing with the local leaders and authorities, about the use of pesticides and insecticides in the region, pollution of low waters, and disposition of human waste superficially among others.

CONCLUSIONS

This experience even with the accomplishments has implied also limitations, errors and conflicts. On the other hand, even with many success indicators, also with many challenges to face, that is to say, that still exist a long way to go. The national governability problem of the water is reflected in the local governability, and at the same time, what occurs locally is an expression of what happens in the national level.

The supply and sanitation of water is a very complex task, dynamic and deep that requires of more understanding with many disciplines, and more holistic action if they want to find more permanent solutions, sustainable and integral. The solution for the water supply requires the joined participation of all actors; social, leaders, schools, church, community authorities, municipal authorities, institutions and social organizations. More durable solutions cannot be charged to individual actors.

The organization and socio-political participation of men and women from the community and towns is indispensable for the sustainability of the supply of water management, but it is not less important than the political incidence in public organisms for the global management of this resource.

The external visions with which intervene the institutions each time show their inefficiency, at the same time that show the need to complement technology and institutional visions with values, knowledge and community behavior. (Indigenous)

The process oriented to the search of sustainable and integral solutions for the water management, should be understood that are at mid-term and long-term time; focused (towns and watersheds) and

with the participation of the civil society and the state in their distinct expressions. Pretend that the isolated communities meet their needs are to weaken the state and in consequence subtract duties from it.

The State should strengthen its public policy around water, as well as strengthen the role of the municipal government if in reality wants to meet the needs of the poorest.

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