

## BOLIVIE

### Inequalities in urban water services in La Paz and El Alto - Bolivia



Inequalities in urban water services are often perceived simplistically, according to a binary interpretation of “access/non-access,” with an end goal of making access to this public service universal. In other words, the issue has long been to ensure that all inhabitants enjoy access to water via a public service. This is all the more true in Bolivia, where water is considered as a “common good” subject to a principle of “non-commodification,” written in the country’s constitution since 2009. But the 2016 water crisis in La Paz has highlighted a new type of inequality in terms of water-supply service. During that drought episode, it was the inhabitants of the neighborhoods in the southern part of La Paz, where people from the middle and upper classes live, who were more exposed to the weakness of the main system of water access and who were deprived of water service. This shows one of the many possible variations in inequality in urban water services, the analysis of which requires going beyond just the question of technical access to the network.

#### CONTEXT

In 2015, the level of access to “improved” water services in Bolivian cities was 97%, while that of wastewater treatment services was limited to 61%. Beyond these general data, the available data on the rates of access to water-supply services does not necessarily reveal other types of urban inequality related to water. Such inequality concerns not just technical access to the network, which, incidentally, is easily recognizable on a servicing map.

They also involve, for example, the question of inequality linked to payment for the service. This type of data is more difficult to obtain, because it is linked to household composition, usage practices, consumption level, and of course income. Another type of inequality arises from the nature of the service provider. The public water service is not the only form of provision of service in cities: there are also small socio-technical systems decentralized at the neighborhood level, which sometimes substitute for the main system or provide supplementary service. They generally offer basic service of acceptable quality and with lower rates, but require active participation by users in collective maintenance work. In addition, a new aspect of inequality is related to the location of some households more exposed than others to the weakness of the main system. This phenomenon was clearly seen during the 2016 water crisis in La Paz, whose southern neighborhoods were deprived of water service for several weeks. Other factors of inequality can be identified, such as the political tendency or social-mobilization capacity of some networks. These factors can sometimes act as real comparative advantages that can sometimes constitute real comparative advantages in the priorities of access to water services and sanitation.

This project is part of the first phase of the Research Facility on Inequalities coordinated by AFD and funded by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Partnerships over the 2017-2020 period. The first phase of the Facility has led to the conduct of 22 research projects and the publication of around 100 research papers and policy briefs.

#### GOALS

This research project is being led by a multidisciplinary team under the coordination of CIDES-UMSA. It seeks to examine and analyze the various types of inequality linked to water and sanitation services in La Paz-El Alto, as well as their trends in recent years, above and beyond the typical determinants such as income (vertical inequalities) and localization (spatial inequalities). In fact, the researchers are also interested in other, less-studied types of determinants, such as exposure to climate change, social representations, and political resources, all of which can affect social cohesion. The objective is to obtain a new interpretation of urban inequalities in La Paz-El Alto, in order to fuel dialog with municipal and sectoral authorities.

This project also seeks to support Bolivian research, through training, methodology workshops, and participation in international conferences, etc.

#### METHOD

This research project follows a multi-disciplinary and multi-theme approach that combines qualitative field surveys covering different areas of the two cities, on key subjects related to i) inequality in water services (trends in services on the urban fringe, small-scale systems, socio-political resources in neighborhoods, shared uses of water in the city, etc.), ii) historical analyses (how inequality in the services started), and iii) statistical analyses. The approach also involves working in connection with the municipal research services. The results from these different surveys and analyses will be discussed regularly at workshops for sharing experiences.

#### RESULTS

Find the presentation of the research paper “Inequalities related to urban water services in La Paz-El Alto, Bolivia” by Sarah Botton (AFD research officer) and Patricia Urquieta (CIDES-UMSA researcher) during the third webinar of the Research Facility on Inequalities:



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01/08/2018 31/01/2020  
Project start date Project end date

La Paz, El Alto  
Location

Fighting Inequalities ,  
Sustainable Cities , Water and  
Sanitation  
Sectors

110 000 EUR  
Financing amount

ACHEVÉ  
Status

Postgrado en Ciencias del  
Desarrollo - Universidad Mayor de  
San Andrés  
Partners

Le contenu de cette fiche projet  
relève de la seule  
responsabilité de l’AFD et ne  
réflète pas nécessairement les  
opinions de l’Union européenne.

## EU-AFD Research Facility on Inequalities Webinar Series

### **Webinar 3**

## **Inequality related to urban water services in Bolivia**

June 8th 2020

#ResearchInequalities



You may find the research papers linked to this project here:

- An overview of inequalities in urban water services in Bolivia
- Conflicts and tensions over water ownership in the territory of the urban-rural interface of Hampaturi, municipality of La Paz
- When governance fails: institutional asymmetries in water management in the municipality of La Paz
- Landscape of springs and collective outdoor laundries in the city of La Paz
- The 'urbanization of water' in La Paz, Bolivia: historical and conceptual perspectives
- Persistence of inequality in access to water: a look at the actions of women in peri-urban territories of the city of El Alto
- Territorial inequalities expressed in children's health in two neighborhoods with access to water in the city of El Alto
- Corporate citizenship and water urbanization on the outskirts of El Alto

You may find the policy briefs here:

- Springs and collective laundries in the City of La Paz, notes for their management
- Access to water : persistence of inequalities in the life of women
- Municipal planning and inter-institutional coordination for good water management
- Water and Sanitation works with Neighborhood Participation: regulated and transparent
- Water provision and management of urban-rural interface territories
- Water in the city of El Alto, a right that arrives incomplete

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