



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United States

### ***Fact Sheet:***

## **WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA**

### **Participatory democracy as a sober example of empowering people to solve water issues**

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In Venezuela water is a key fundamental human right, an essential element for life, rather than a commodity.

Through the 1999 Constitution, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has empowered the population as real owners and managers of water to ensure its rational use and share common responsibilities. Contributing to water conservation and management in quality and quantity, its rational use in a necessary sustainable manner, as well as disposal and treatment for reuse are all shared responsibilities between the population and the government.

Under the umbrella of participatory democracy, Venezuelans discuss and develop execution plans on issues such as access to clean water and sanitation through community structures called Water Community Boards (Mesas Técnicas de Agua).

#### ***Water Resources in Venezuela***

Venezuela has a dense hydrographic system with over a thousand of rivers, 2500 lagoons and two big lakes, putting the country among the top 15 nations in amount of fresh water reserves. However, 85% of these water resources are located in southern part of the country.

#### ***A Community proposal to address the problem***

In 1999 the Venezuelan government initiated a public policy aimed at democratizing water access and sanitation through the empowerment of organized communities across Venezuela.<sup>1</sup>

Special emphasis was made in the northern part of the country where water resources are scarce and more that 75% of traditionally excluded Venezuelans

lives mainly in large cities. There the people have long struggled to gain access to vital resources such as clean water.

In the past, traditional bureaucratic institutions attempted to address the problem, but as they did not engage the people and communities, solutions were elusive.

Today in Venezuela there is an understanding that it is not possible to solve such serious problems without the community's participation.

#### ***Water Community Board***

A Water Community Board (WCB) is a grassroots organization accountable for the management of water-related issues within the community, such as supply shortage, leaking pipes, pollution, sanitation, etc.<sup>2</sup> The scope of WCBs includes actions to improve, maintain and monitor water quality and sanitation service for its settlements.

The WCB reflects the will and the commitment of the community and the state (represented by Hidroven, a public water company) as a joint effort to assure clean water to all its citizens.

To date, 3000 WCBs have been established in traditionally excluded communities such as shanty towns and rural areas, providing benefits to more than 400,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

#### ***Achieving the U.N Millennium Development Goals***

The WCBs contributed to the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for water by 2005, "**10 years in advance**".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Ibarra, "Venezuela celebra el Día Mundial del Agua," Ministry of Information and Communication, March 22, 2007. [http://www.minci.gob.ve/reportajes/2/12876/venezuela\\_celebra\\_eldia.html](http://www.minci.gob.ve/reportajes/2/12876/venezuela_celebra_eldia.html).

<sup>4</sup> Miguel Lacabana and Cecilia Cariola, "Historia e identidad de las Mesas Técnicas de Agua," *Cuadernos del Cendes*, Año 24,

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<sup>1</sup> Hidrocapital website, [http://www.hidrocapital.com.ve/index.asp?spg\\_id=9](http://www.hidrocapital.com.ve/index.asp?spg_id=9) (Accessed March 3, 2009)



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More than 7 million Venezuelans now have access to clean drinking water:

- 95% in urban areas and 79% in rural areas.
- There are plans to reach 100% coverage by 2010.

Regarding sewage collection:

- Thus far sanitation has increased from 62% in 1999 to 82% in 2008.
- Water treatment has increased from 9% in 1999 to 27% today.<sup>5</sup>

**March 3, 2009**

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No .66, Septiembre- Diciembre 2007, <http://www.cendes-ucv.edu.ve/pdfs/revista66/cap7.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> “En los últimos 8 años se logró darle servicio de agua potable a 7 millones de venezolano,” Interview with the Vice Minister for Water of the Environment Ministry, March 22, 2007.  
[http://www.minamb.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=343&Itemid=99](http://www.minamb.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=343&Itemid=99)