WOMEN AND WATER: GENDER, PRIVATIZATION, AND WATER RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Water is a vital natural resource and a human right. When water is not accessible and is unaffordable—as it often occurs during privatization—women experience the biggest impact. In 1992 at the Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment, four principles were adopted, in which one focused its attention on women and their role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. This principle recognizes an important reality, which is that women are and have been central to water management. However, integrating a gendered perspective to water management—although crucial for sustainable development—has not been successfully implemented. The Dublin Conference declared water should be recognized as an economic good instead of a common good. Interestingly, in July 2010 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the human right to water; however, how it has been implemented, negotiated and experienced has remained a challenge, given water’s new economic value. Elaborating on this concept and examining the world’s fresh water as a human right and not a source for commercial profit, through this thesis, I will attempt to argue that water should be controlled by the citizens and nongovernmental organizations and not by private corporations. In addition I will
strongly support the argument that women are already major components of water management and are most affected by water scarcity, and therefore a gendered perspective is necessary in creating successful water resource management solutions. Secondly, I will contend that water is a human right and that it should be managed by the citizens and nongovernmental organizations, not private corporations in order for it to be more accessible to women and other vulnerable communities, like the poor.

First, as a result of the arguments I mentioned, the thesis will begin with an introduction of the foundational issues surrounding water and its critical state. Particularly, I will lay out an analysis of the water problem being faced around the globe and in the Latin American region. In addition, I will illustrate issues of water supply, sanitation, and hygiene to demonstrate the daunting statistics that many in developing countries are experiencing due to water scarcity and lack of access to clean water. I will also introduce how women are impacted and why they haven’t been fully integrated into water management solutions; along with specifics of international treaties such as the Dublin Principles, the Kyoto Declaration and the United Nations General Assembly’s 2010 recognition of the human right to water. I will briefly discuss the controversies behind the right to water, as I will discuss this issue in more depth in Chapter 3.

Once the water problem’s impact is established, I will narrow the thesis’ focus on both women and the region of Latin America. Specifically, I will provide an analysis of the relationship between gender, women, and water in Latin America. Through this analysis, I will then have an examined platform of the two foundational
components of the thesis: women and water and the critical need that exists in integrating gender into sustainable water solutions.

Secondly, I will argue that if the United Nations General Assembly’s acknowledgement of the human right to water is to become effective, water should be managed by its citizens and NGOs, not private corporations, as this will allow for there to be water democracy. In this third section of the thesis, I will focus upon the risks involved when delegating control of a life-sustaining resource, such as water, to for-profit companies. In this section of the thesis I will expand the issue of water privatization with supporting literature which focuses their attention on the disparity that is created by water privatization and specifically, how this disparity affects women the most. Additionally, I will illustrate the issues of how privatization emerged as a preferred method, along with the failures that privatization has perpetuated in developing nations of Latin America and their reactions to reform.

To illustrate the experiences of Latin American women and water privatization, I will feature two country analyses; Mexico and Bolivia. I will first showcase the experiences of Mexico, to aim light to how women have been involved in water rights, natural resource management and their active role in attempting to have access to fresh clean water. Second, through outlining Bolivia’s infamous water war, I will show the disparities that privatization has created and the political and cultural impact that it had in this country along with the long-term effects and continuous battles. I have selected these two countries as sample studies due to their environmental vulnerability to water crises; and specifically, due to the important role women have led in the fight for water
rights; and how water privatization has impacted these two nations. Through these studies, I will add to the thesis’ argument that a gendered perspective is necessary in crafting successful water resource management solutions; while also illustrating and outlining how privatization perpetuates gender inequality and disenfranchises water rights in Latin American countries.

In the final section of the thesis I will first develop recommendations on how to integrate key stakeholders, such as women into critical sustainable water policy solutions, and how this will allow and enable the possibility for a gendered perspective of water management; and address the possible alternatives to water privatization and why these are critical in sustainable water development. Secondly, I will suggest that commitments to gender equality be officially integrated into future water discussions at the United Nations, environmental conferences, and global organizations—not just through lip-service, but through modes of monitoring and evaluation in order to effectively implement and see impact within the water sector. Lastly, I will develop a final conclusion which will provide an overall analysis of the thesis’ argument on integrating women in water resource management solutions, and the importance in viewing water as a human right so those with the highest stake and who are most impacted, have a say in its management, such as its users and citizens, and NGOs, not private corporations.
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my family; especially, my mother without whom I would be lost. Thank you for sacrificing so much to give me the tools I needed to become who I am today; for loving me unconditionally, supporting me during this journey, and for always having high expectations of me. Thank you for raising me to value my Honduran roots.

Finally, to the women in Latin American who fight every day for equality; I admire and respect your resilience and unwillingness to be ignored. You are force larger than the world can imagine.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE WATER PROBLEM

Water is a fundamental human right which as a common good, every person in the world should have access to and be able to have on a daily basis. Latin America has the most annual rainfall of any region in the world but continues to have the problem of the lack of access to clean water. Conversely, it is also a region stricken with the most inequitable income distribution, and thus poor people experience the biggest brunt from water contamination and scarcity, (Beeson 2008). According to the World Health Organization there are currently 1.1 billion people in developing nations still lacking safe drinking water and more than 2.4 billion people lacking access to improved sanitation (Sultana and Loftus 2012, 62). As such, water-borne illnesses is the leading cause of infant mortality in developing nations; 2.5 million people die each year from a lack of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation devices and services—that is an average of about 6,800 people per day or five people per minute, (Sultana and Loftus, 2012). Under target 7c in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—which derived from the Millennium Declaration—a universal call was introduced to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2012). Almost 100 percent of North Americans have access to abundant clean drinking water in the home, in comparison to only 69 percent of Mexicans having such access; water rights are something many in the developed world may take for granted, as they are not yet necessarily being fully impacted, (Staddon, Appleby and Grant 2012, 62). It is
imperative to bring global attention to the right to clean water, and its importance should be articulated to aim light into the politics, governmental, and social struggles that derive from water scarcity in order to push the MDGs agenda. In particular, access to clean water should be showcased through the experiences of the most impacted, such as women. Women are the most affected by the daunting statistics highlighted above; possible solutions and insight into their real-life water-related problems can help provide possible solutions to the millions facing lack of access to water. Furthermore, women’s experiences as key stakeholders in water scarcity or lack of access to water can provide clarification and insight on current problems and in return help develop sustainable water management solutions.

I will now introduce the foundational issues surrounding water; specifically, I will lay out an analysis that aims light into the importance of water’s critical challenges and global need, such as scarcity, the lack of access to water, and its impact on women. In addition, I will also discuss in detail, the Dublin Principles, the Kyoto Declaration and the United Nations General Assembly’s 2010 affirmation of, “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a universal human right,” (Sultana and Loftus 2012, 62). In Chapter 3, I will provide a deeper analysis on this topic, but for now it will be important to describe the controversies behind the right to water as it relates to commons versus commodity. More importantly, my objective in this chapter is to explain the water problem through data which illustrates issues of water scarcity, water rights, sanitation, and hygiene—all with the particular focus of how these impact women, with some content related to the continent of Latin America.
Global Water Trends

Water is quickly becoming scarce and although many in the developed nations do not experience drastic consequences, it is the poorest nations in the world that are often characterized by not only a problem of overpopulation but also low-base water coverage, (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2012, 11). In fact, author and water activist Maude Barlow expresses her concerns in Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water, and argues that, “the world is facing a water crisis due to pollution, climate change and surging population growth of such magnitude that close to two billion people now live in water-stressed regions of the planet,” (2007, 3). Water experts, like Barlow, continue to warn that if the stressors mentioned are not addressed and, or, creative solutions are not developed, two-thirds of the world’s population will face water scarcity by the year 2025. Much of this reasoning lies behind statistics which show that another three billion people will have been added to our population by 2050, therefore exponentially increasing our need for water supplies and food, (Barlow 2007, 3). It’s important to note that when I emphasize that we are running out of water, it doesn’t necessarily mean we won’t have water by the year 2050, what it does mean is that we may not have clean water to use or drink.

International groups like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UNICEF and the World Health Organization, agree there is a water scarcity problem and understand that over the coming decades the world’s water challenges will only grow. Specifically, USAID recognizes that, “human pressures on
freshwater ecosystems, water resources, and watersheds from urban growth, industrial development, and pollution…” (USAID 2011, 2), are detrimental to the increasing problem of water scarcity and lack of access to water. Much of the world and its communities rely heavily on sustainable supplies of fresh water, as is the case in agriculture where more than 70 percent of all human water use is spent; however, as population grows and hydrological systems are put under incredible pressure, the environment and its water resource face frightening challenges, (USAID 2011, 3).

In the World Health Organization and UNICEF’s 2012 report on The Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation, the adoption of the MDGs presents the current progress towards achieving halving the proportion of people without access to sustainable clean water and basic sanitation by the year 2015. The report claims that the water MDG target has been met, but there still remains a lot of disconcerting data which shows a continued water problem with associated sanitation and hygiene issues. For example, although water coverage of water supply sources has improved to almost 90 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, the report notes that despite significant declines in open defecation—the majority of those still practicing live in rural areas of Latin America, with 17 percent of its population engaging in open defecation, (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2012, 4). However, the report highlights that open defecation is decreasing in critical regions of Latin America; and that globally, the number of people using what is called ‘shared sanitation’ is increasing. Shared sanitation refers to a group of people relying or sharing public sanitation facilities—also known as a predominantly urban practice. The World Health Organization and
UNICEF contain that in the case of Bolivia, data shows 27 percent improvement in sanitation facility usage, 36 percent usage of shared sanitation facilities, and 23 percent of the population using open defecation, (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2012, 21). In addition, the report mentions the sanitation MDG target will not be met by 2015, but that globally we are moving towards improved sanitation facility usage and access, (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2012, 15). During the last 20 years, water consumption techniques like piping, wells and irrigation systems have experienced an interesting shift; in particular, these shifts have occurred in piped water supplies in rural areas, while due to the rise of urban populations in major cities, the usage of piped water has increased, (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2012, 9-10). Overall, the report’s data show that disparities in rural and urban sanitation are far more prominent than those found in drinking water statistics.

It is necessary I examine both past and current water usage pattern behavior, in order to better grasp how these statistics have become realities in developing nations in Latin America. Indeed, the idea that developed countries consume more than their share of the planet’s natural resources, is nothing new. Due to the wealth of countries like the United States, their citizens have not fully experienced water shortages, instead, this problem has become an issue for the global South, a region that suffers water problems due to overpopulation. Let it be clarified that when I reference the ‘global South,’ countries considered to be in development and for this thesis in particular, countries located in Latin America are for which such reference is made; conversely, the global North is considered the developed nations, such as the United
States and the United Kingdom. It’s important that I outline Latin America’s experiences with water consumption and water-borne diseases. According to a 2001 United Nations report on water access and services cited in *Opposing Currents: The Politics of Water and Gender in Latin America*, edited by Vivienne Bennett, Sonia Dávila-Poblete, and María Nieves Rico; 16 percent of the total population living in Latin America lives without water service—that is an estimated eight percent of the urban population and 32 percent of the rural population, (2005, 3). In addition, 80 percent of all illnesses and one third of Latin America’s regional mortalities are due to contaminated water, which in turn impact this regions’ health care expenditures and financing ability for economic growth and global participation, (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005, 3). Amongst other statistics, the average human needs approximately 50 liters of water for daily usage for drinking, cooking and sanitation; however, the average North American use almost 600 liters a day, critically impacting and therefore creating a huge gap in water use between developed nations and those in development, (Barlow 2007, 5). Further, in Latin America and the Caribbean there are more than 130 million people without safe drinking water, while only about 86 percent (closer to 90 percent according to the World Health Organization and UNICEF) of these are connected to adequate systems of sanitation; consequently, many in this region suffer from chronic dehydration, and sanitation and hygiene issues that affect their health, (Barlow 2007, 9).

Poor urban Latin American communities and low-income rural areas suffer from water scarcity issues, so when water becomes unreliable and scarce, household
dynamics play a big role in who is left to manage the water. In fact, water gathering is not only labor-intensive, but also incredibly demanding, both physically and socially. Because low-income urban and rural areas of Latin America experience either having to wait for trucks to deliver water, or for faucets to provide water for only a few hours during the day (that is if piped water systems exist), the task of water gathering creates hardship for a particular group. Women are often the caretakers within a household, and therefore in charge of collecting clean water for their home. Thus, because women spend so much time collecting water during the day, a trickle effect is created where women are denied the ability to focus on other tasks, such as being more active in their communities, their children’s education, becoming involved in water management solutions or development projects, or in finding work that provides income (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005, 17-18). It is well recorded that in Latin American households, women are the most impacted by water scarcity problems due to their role as primary users, providers, and by default, water managers, (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005, 17). Also, because the, “dichotomies between water for household use (which is considered part of the “private, domestic” sphere) and water for irrigation (which is recognized as located in the “public, productive” sphere) have led to a division of the water world into more or less neatly gendered halves,” (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005, 14), the accepted behavior of how household water versus irrigation water is treated, denies the ability to include both men and women’s water experiences. Consequently, the possibility of developing a gendered approach in water management solutions falls short and women, in particular become invisible (See
Box 1). The water sector was one of the first to recognize women as key potential contributors; for much of the 1990s and even early 2000s, women’s true interests and experiences were only seen through the domestic lens or as consumers only, and so a recognition of involving them beyond their ascribed gender roles of consumers (instead of proactive in providing and solving water supply problems) became absent, (Coles and Wallace 2005, 3-12). It is imperative I note that gender only partially designs the needs of women in relation to water, as gender is also linked to social class, ethnicity and wealth; and, in Latin America, men continuously manage the formal rights to the control of water management as they hold more wealth and higher social status, thus this only perpetuates gender inequality in the water sector, (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005, 20). In general, because water carries with itself so much power, many contest for, “the ownership and control of water resources through

Box 1: Gender and Gender Approach in Water Management

**Gender** is defined and refers to the differences in socially constructed roles and opportunities associated with being a man or a woman. It is the interactions and social relations between men and women; and it also determines expectations, permitted behavior and how both men and women are individually valued in a determined environment.

**Gender Approach** allows for a theoretical and methodological analysis of gender relations to occur, thus enabling deeper understanding of gender dynamics in specific contexts, such as water scarcity and lack of access to water, which consequently helps build opportunity to promote equity.

Aguilar 2009.
which many groups—and it seems particularly women—have been dispossessed,” (Coles and Wallace 2005, 21), therefore critically impacting women’s abilities to have control and opinion within this sector.

Significant proportions of the world lack adequate access to clean water; as a result, water as a human right has for many years been a topic of much discussion in the international community. Water rights experts argue that in the past 25 years, water for domestic use has been associated as a social right, while water for irrigation has not; thus, water for irrigation is treated as a product or an economic commodity, (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005, 15). I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3. For now, as mentioned, integrating women’s perspective, experiences and responsibilities has been absent in water management strategies, consequently, women are acknowledged as household and domestic water consumers, not as managers. Hence, international water activist and gender experts have supported throughout the past 20 years the ideology that incorporating a gender mainstream approach is essential for developing solutions for water management. A gender mainstream approach is internationally recognized and involves the integration of gender issues into all policies, planning and practices into an organization or project; it involves enabling equal participation from both men and women and allowing equal control and equal treatment, (Regmi 2005, 96). In fact, this movement has come to light in many conferences, treaties, and environmental agendas in the past two decades. Women and men experiences differ tremendously, and in cases of water scarcity and lack of access to water, the reason why an emphasis on the relationship between women and water
has submerged is due to the heavy burden that they experience as default water managers; such as, a lack of educational opportunities and financial burdens. I will elaborate more on the relationship between gender and water, along with impacts in Chapter 2. Girls and women lead as persons responsible for gathering water across the globe, however, it’s important to note men’s role as well if we are to truly develop gendered water strategies and solutions. Lastly, it is important to note that in regions of the world—such as Latin America—the vicious cycles of water scarcity and lack of clean water, mixed with a severe misuse by developed nations, has increasingly placed a heavy burden on the current existing water resources. Consequently, water has become a critical source for which the control of it embodies power, contention, and recently, financial profit. How water is managed during our lifetime will be critical to the social welfare of humankind, (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005, 4).

Global Regulations and Water Rights

The importance given to integrating women as key stakeholders and having a gender mainstream approach for water solutions has been pushed, but many argue no real progress has actually occurred and the topic is discussed through lip-service only. Gender relations considerations are instrumental to water management solutions, and are more critical to consider since water has developed into various forms that place it under ethical controversy, as does the argument of the human right to water versus an economic good. Water has a unique and life-giving value, therefore treaties and international agreements have pushed for water to be idolized as an economic entity, while others—mostly water rights advocates—have pushed for water to remain a
human right or a commons. In the following section, I will provide an overview of the various and most influential international treaties and declarations from the past 20 years, and show the various positions water has taken, (either as an economic good or as a common good and human right); and showcase the importance that has been drafted to push for an effort to consider and involve women as not only consumers, but also as managers, leaders, and advocates in this sector.

The 1992 Dublin Principles, the Kyoto Declaration in 2003 accompanied by the 2010 United Nations General Assembly resolution recognizing the human right to water and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have drafted a basis for how water should be treated, and have also stirred criticism and invited applause from international water groups, advocates and people affected by water problems. Each of these international treaties and declarations has impacted the management of water and its sustainability on a global scale. Consequently, I believe water’s impact should be addressed with careful consideration given to these treaties, as they have influenced how water is portrayed (commons or economic good), distributed; managed through governments, private corporations, NGOSs and citizens. However, we must also be cognizant of not devaluing the sector, region, and severity of its scarcity that is experienced in the vulnerable regions of Latin America.

The 1992 Dublin Principles

The 1992 Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment is the single most influential piece of water-related policy because of the adoption of the infamous four
Dublin Principles. The Guiding Principles of the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development are as follows:

1- Fresh water is finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment.

2- Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels.

3- Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.

4- Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good, (Staddon, Appleby, and Grant 2012, 67).

The first principle focuses on increasing water’s sustainability in development efforts worldwide, the second principle outlines the importance of an overall participatory approach, the third acknowledges that women do play central roles in water issues and have been for some time, and the fourth principle establishes water as an economic good, conceptually shifting the idea of water as a human right, (Bennett 2005, 1). In particular and for the purpose of this thesis, I believe of special interest and impact are the third and fourth principles, both of which establish gender and water-related rights and issues under very particular policy pathways.

In the third principle, which I believe to be of critical importance in water management, women have not been efficiently integrated into global water policies; in fact, although transcribing this principle into reality would be straightforward as it, “…recognizes an important reality: not that women should become central to water management but that they already are…” (Bennett 2005, 2), issues of needs versus access and property rights have hindered the involvement and importance given to
women. Women are experienced in water management, their knowledge is highly needed to mold policy planning in the water sector, however, as articulated by water experts like Vivienne Bennett, the belief of incorporating women into water policies has been the least understood principle; therefore gender integration has been a neglected approach, that has only received attention through lip service, and not necessarily formulated into policy, (Bennett 2005, 5). For example, the use, access and comprehension of the importance of water management can vary significantly between men and women, even though they each may work together in the field and with water. Yet, despite women’s abilities in water management they are almost always considered and seen as playing the role of helpers and not managers; thus, cultural constraints such as household demands, prevent women from attending water-user meetings and speaking on issues of access and irrigation. Consequently, when only men are given the ability and opportunity to participate in water management and planning, “valuable opportunities to design the most effective community water systems are lost,” (Bennett 2005, 6), as the most impacted along with their issues become invisible. I will formulate more in-depth analysis in Chapter 2 about the relationship between gender, women and water; and particular, the importance in integrating women’s water experiences into water management solutions and strategies in order to successfully develop a gendered water approach that involves men and women’s roles, responsibilities and needs.

The fourth Dublin principle has indeed pushed water’s image from a right to a commodity, which in return has welcomed the private sector to become involved in its
management and profitability prospect. More importantly, a revolution has occurred with the way water is perceived in global policies—do we adopt a commodity view or a commons view in regards to water? International leaders, policy makers and water activists are in a debate of controversy over the view of water as a commodity. Those who critique this principle argue that it is impossible to put a price tag on a natural resource such as water and more importantly, that commercializing the environment carries with itself an ethical problem that not only denies the poor access to water, but it also disenfranchises the value of it being a right for humankind’s survival, (Bakker 2010, 91). On the other side, we see that the fourth Dublin principle has produced privatization—which has found much support not only among local and national politicians, but also international water corporations whose argument is that private management would guarantee better service and access to the most marginalized. Nevertheless, since 1992, how water has been framed has resulted in commercialization and privatization, which has only perpetuated inequality amongst women and other vulnerable communities that are unable to afford or access such private services.

I strongly believe it is imperative to elaborate the difference between water as a commodity and water as a commons. First, the commodity view of water asserts that, “private ownership and management of water supply systems (in distinction from water itself) is possible and indeed preferable…water is no different than other essential goods and utility services,” (Bakker 2012, 29). Thus, this view commercializes water as an economic good that sees water users as customers, and so
pushing for a water conservancy agenda can be incentivized through pricing, as users will be more cognizant of using it wisely. In contrast, the commons view of water adheres to the unique traits and life-giving significance that water brings. From this perspective, water is essential for life and our ecosystem; it is also tightly bound to communities and therefore should be managed by them. My position remains that pushing for water democracy through community-based and decentralized water conservation, which is politically and culturally inspired rather than economically motivated, will allow for water to remain a human right whilst at the same time stay in the hands of the communities within where water problems exist. However, because water governance has failed many across Latin America, the privatization of water has been welcomed as an alternative; even though nongovernmental actors can have a proactive role in water management and services, and citizens’ equal participation and their impact can have positive change in water management policy, perhaps in a better way than private corporations, (Linton 2012, 50). Lastly, there are controversies behind viewing water as a human right, and so there is ambivalence that exists in viewing water this way. In Chapter 3, I will further discuss this dichotomy.

**The Kyoto Declaration 2003**

During the Third World Water Forum in March 2003, the private sector received the global consensus that it was best suited for managing the world’s water systems of the South. Water as a human right had not been acknowledged or addressed yet, so global financial entities like the World Bank used the Kyoto forum to address its agenda on water financing. Specifically, the big water companies were concerned
about their ability to be sustainable without any financial guarantees from the international financial institutions, in particular in the countries of Latin America, (Barlow 2007, 56). The message throughout was that without public financing, private and big water companies could not commit to possible unstable economic and currency devaluation, and therefore it could not guarantee permanent and continued presence in developing poor countries. The Kyoto Declaration embodied the philosophy that in the development sector came to be known as liberal environmentalism, green neoliberalism, or market environmentalism; all of which are considered a, “mode of resource regulation which aims to deploy markets as the solution to environmental problems,” (Bakker 2012, 20). During the Kyoto water forum, co-organizers like the World Water Council and the Global Water Partnership came under fire from water activists who saw both agencies having ties to private sector water companies and international financial institutions, (Bakker 2010, 135). Activists at the forum protested against the idea of privatizing water and instead preferred for water democracy and its recognition as a human right, but their demands were not met and so delegates supported the involvement of the private sector’s financing in water supply management, (Bakker 2010, 136). While the idea of water as a human right was not at all mentioned in the declarations in Kyoto, many water industry members began to associate and favor the idea of water as a human right, and so private corporations argued that the best way to fulfill the human right to water was allowing private water corporations the ability to market, properly regulate, and dispense water, (Bakker 2012,
Although the World Bank acknowledged the human right to water shortly after the Kyoto forum, the United Nations did not pass such notion until 2010.

*United National General Assembly 2010*

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights published General Comment 15 in 2000, where the right to water was recognized as a human right, but it wasn’t until July 28, 2010 that the United Nations General Assembly recognized the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and declared, “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights,” (Staddon, Appleby, and Grant 2012, 64). Shortly after the resolution, the United Nations Human Rights Council supported the right as legally binding, by stating that, water should be a basic right and its supply should safe, accessible and affordable for both drinking and sanitation services, and even more important, that it should be of good quality and quantity. It is imperative I mention that although this is an important indicator of how water is to be addressed, it does not create an enforceable universal right to water. In fact, although water is viewed as non-substitutable and necessary for life and its right cannot be denied, as human rights cannot be traded, sold or denied to someone simply based on inability to pay—water rights are a privilege, because, “water is simultaneously constructed as property, and is thus subject to national and local legal traditions of possession,” (Meehan 2012, 163). Consequently, proponents of water privatization have taken the cause of water as a human right; many have argued that much of the problem in this conundrum lies in the fact that human rights doctrine is rooted in political and economic individualism;
consequently, the alternate agenda has instead pushed for a shift in tactics that work to recognize and empower alternative concepts of property rights into community economies of water, (Linton 2012, 47).

**Conclusion**

It’s imperative to recognize that water is a life-giving source which all humans need in order to survive. In particular, women have been denied the ability to participate and invoke opinion and change in water management solutions, due to cultural and gender-ascribed roles within their communities. And even though the Dublin Principles provided the guideline to follow in order to push for gender equality in water management, much has yet to be done in this area. In addition, contradiction has been stirred by treaties and declarations over the years as they have gone back and forth on how to treat water in relation to how political, governance, and social actors are to use it, consume it and manage it. Water continues to be a commodity that only a few can afford and so it remains a challenge in how issues of gender equality and integration of women in water management solutions will be developed; how property rights will be addressed, and the distinction and significance that is given to the term ‘human right’ when considering commons versus commodity.
In Latin America, like many regions of the world, women’s work in relation to water is culturally associated with belonging to the private spaces of everyday life; for example, women tend to the household use and management of water for cooking, cleaning, and child-care. As such, the work of managing household water falls usually and primarily on women, because, “historically they have been, and especially among the poor continue to be, the managers of the sphere of reproduction, while men’s role in relation to water tends to occur within the sphere of production,” (Zwarteveen and Bennett 2005, 16). Although in the world of gender policies, water is hardly mentioned, a parallel connection does indeed exist and so it is this chapter’s focus to aim light into this relationship and provide more depth and understanding about the paradigm that breathes within both men and women’s roles in water management.

First, it is important to acknowledge that both men and women’s gender relations and their experiences in water-related issues differ tremendously. However, these experiences must be paralleled when integrating them into the creation of effective sustainable development solutions in water. Additionally, because women have such a great responsibility to carry in water management and are most impacted by its scarcity and pollution in Latin America, it behooves to address gender equity issues of access to water and the impact these have on both men and women in order to successfully create a gender mainstream approach that maintains gender equality as the main goal. To better illustrate the relationship between women and water, its
management in both household and irrigation, and their experiences with sanitation, and hygiene; I will address and expose the limitations, relationships and roles that exist while also not excluding the important role that men play within these dynamics.

**The Connection between Women and Water**

Men and women experience and face social, economic, and environmental issues in different ways; how each partakes within these sectors also differs based on age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and their cultural setting. A mainstream gender approach in water management addresses sanitation and hygiene, and specifically their association within domestic and irrigation use to promote, “understanding of how the identities of women and men determine different vulnerabilities and capacities to deal with climate change...” (United Nations Development Program 2009, 25). Specifically, in Latin America, women experience the biggest burden as family work usually covers about one third of their daily activities, and fetching water for domestic use consumes time they could invest in gaining an education, obtaining jobs that provide income or in engaging deeper with their community and taking leadership roles. It’s important I emphasize that women are the main users of water since they manage how it is used for cooking, washing, family hygiene and sanitation for themselves and their household. In fact, it is usually women alone who decide where and how to collect water for domestic use, what amount and how to use it.

In matters of sanitation and hygiene, women are primarily responsible for sanitation and health at the household level; women find water and educate children in hygiene matters and help understand the impact of poor sanitation and health, because
they are deeply and personally impacted by it. There are areas of Latin America where poor sanitation and hygiene issues are high, the transmission of diarrhea, cholera, typhoid and other parasitic infections impact the health, nutrition and well-being of women, men, and their children. Poor sanitation and hygiene impact children’s learning capabilities, and men and women’s abilities to get work or contribute to their communities all of which have an overall impact on their community’s economic and social development, (Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water 2004, 8). However, women often have little voice or recognition in the safeguarding of health through proper sanitation and hygiene services, despite their direct association and prominent roles and responsibilities in sanitation and hygiene, (Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water 2004, 4).

Further, even though women in Latin America do not have the time, financial capacity or technological access to manage their water resources, they carry an abundance of knowledge about not only the reliability of water, but also its location, and seasonal variation within their local community, thus making their personal experiences unique and valuable in water-related management issues, (Aureli and Brelet 2004, 9). Because of their close relationship with water, “women understand better the need for protecting water resources…[and] are more active and passionate participants in the design and implementation of projects or programs for the environmentally sound use of water,” (Donoso, Bakkum and, Troetsch 2000, 13). Hence, a mainstream gender approach commits to creating gender equality which in return allow for the success and sustainability of water management. It is imperative
that women are empowered and encouraged to provide their personal insight into
decision-making, not only in domestic water issues, but also in irrigation as they also
partake within this area of their communities. Women are by default, water managers
and understand best the impact that water scarcity causes in areas of sanitation and
hygiene, and clean water access. I should note that it is not the intention of this thesis
to say men or boys aren’t affected by water-related issues or that they are not integral
in creating sustainable water solutions. However men and boys play a different role
within the water sector, and it is one that usually places them in leadership or decision-
making roles for men, and pushes boys to have more time to attend school, as they are
not culturally forced or expected to adhere, as girls usually are, to domestic chores.

Now, I will provide a deeper understanding of male and female dynamics in
domestic versus irrigation management use, which will allow for a clearer view of the
intricacies that both sectors demand and create in water management and in particular,
for women. Through this I will be able to illustrate a clearer understanding of the roles
that men and women play within the domestic and irrigation sector; which will display
the unique connection between women and water and why women often remain
invisible in having a voice and opinion within water-related matters.

*Domestic Water and Irrigation in Latin America*

In Latin America there are variations in how women manage and are impacted
by water in both the domestic sphere and in irrigation; men are seen and acknowledged
as leaders in irrigation due to property rights and cultural dynamics within
communities, whereas women are seen and connected only to household or domestic
water issues. Because there is a universal mentality of creating a distinction between water for household use and water for irrigation, a strengthened and categorized view of how men and women’s roles are addressed and integrated into water management have perpetuated inequality for women. The tendency to create separate water domains for men and women has only hindered an understanding of the complexities that exist between men and women’s varied uses with water, rather than create linkages between the two and therefore infuse a gender mainstream approach, (Zwarteveen and Bennett 2005, 28). For the most part, domestic water issues are usually framed within the context of being related to either social rights, sanitation and hygiene, health and other basic household needs; while issues of water and irrigation are solely associated to production and economic profit. Consequently, the stereotype of gender roles has landed men as being only associated with irrigation, and women only as users within the domestic sector. However, in order to develop more effective and sustainable water management solutions a mainstream gender approach must be integrated which includes the experiences and roles of both men and women, while also eliminating cultural and gender stereotypes that place women in association within only the domestic or private sphere. Regrettably, what usually occurs in Latin America is that gender divisions allocate many of the water responsibilities to women but place most powers and rights in men, either due to property rights or cultural dynamics which see men as more qualified to represent the household community, (Zwarteveen and Bennett 2005, 26-28).
According to water and gender advocates, Margreet Zwarteveen and Vivienne Bennett, the, “basic needs/social welfare approach to domestic water recognizes women’s needs for water, which in itself does not guarantee that they will have the right to a voice in water management, but it at least establishes that women have a legitimate place on drinking water and sanitation policy agendas,” (Zwarteveen and Bennett 2005, 13). On the other hand however, the approach taken towards irrigation policy primarily focuses on production and farming, so it is strongly associated with men, thus making women invisible within this sector. This isn’t to say that women are not active in the irrigation or farming areas of communities in Latin America, instead, what occurs is women are seldom seen as farmers by water management agency staff or by their own communities; as a result, they are denied associated rights and resources within irrigation, but are granted more recognition in water management within the domestic water sector, (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005).

There are dichotomies between water for household or private/domestic sphere and water for irrigation or public/productive sphere, therefore gender divisions are perpetuated into a woman’s world versus a man’s world. In Latin America, a gender bias (See Box 2), “also renders invisible the different priorities that men and women assign to water within each sphere as well as their different knowledge bases regarding water use that could be applied to water project design,” (Zwarteveen and Bennett 2005, 14). For example, when men migrate, as often occurs in many countries of Latin America, wives, mothers and children are left to manage the land and by default, its water management. However, although they become the land and water managers, this
Box 2: Gender Bias in Water Management

Gender Bias refers to unequal access to resources, such as land, water and credit, and new technologies. It also refers to gender-differentiated access to the basic and important process that is making and implementing decisions within both the domestic or private water sector and the irrigation or public sector. The exclusiveness of role distribution and its implications for the allocation of resources and distribution of power is what is important, therefore when women are excluded from certain roles based on the idea that they do not perform within a particular sector, gender bias occurs.

Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005.

doesn’t mean they are given immediate access to have a voice in water-user assemblies; in fact, women then often face problems with access to credit and with irrigation, such as schedules that may work for the men in their communities, may not work for women who have children and must tend to household work as well. The challenges that women face are multiplied when they are not included in water management meetings, as they are the first to be impacted by gender biased solutions that only consider men’s opinions and roles.

Challenges for Gender Equality in the Water Sector

Male and female roles in Latin American society are strongly influenced by religion and culture which were influenced by Hispanic colonial values and the Catholic Church; thus, throughout time, these have limited women to the domestic/household or reproductive sphere, (Bastidas 2005, 155). Changing this behavior is a challenge that gender and water advocates must address and analyze carefully when attempting to integrate women’s opinions into water
management. During the 1990s, and after the Dublin International Conference on Water and Environment, water took on a more predominant role in policy making in Latin America; international gatherings began to include water and recognized the importance of involving women to achieve sustainable change within this sector, (Dávila-Poblete and Rico 2005, 37-38).

However, although gender policies attempted to focus the important component of gender into water management, it remains difficult to find cases of women organizing around water issues in Latin America and so much of what has been created in policy, hasn’t necessarily been translated into concrete and effective actions. In fact, although the third Dublin principle discusses women, “nowhere in the action agenda or the report on the conference is there any further mention of the third principle, its objectives, or prescriptions for its implementation,” (Bennett 2005, 7). Consequently, global policies have not succeeded in pushing the agenda of a gender approach; however, since the MDGs, some change has taken effect in thinking and practice, but, “the water goal does not incorporate a gender perspective—its focus is on coverage rather than access or equity,” (Wallace and Coles 2005, 9). As such, much lip service has occurred but no real analysis or change has been seen; concepts of gender inequality and equality, along with the importance of reshaping these to ensure that women are able to achieve positive and lasting changes in status, remain absent, (See Box 3). So one should ask, since water and women are both considered to be essential to life, why have gender issues in water not been addressed or solved by now?
Box 3: Gender equality and inequality in Water Management

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities that men, women, girls and boys have in a given setting. The term equality between men and women is a human rights issue that is an indicator of sustainable development.

Gender inequality refers to the unfair and unequal distribution of accessible resources and opportunities for men and women. By closing gender gaps, men and in particular women, would be exposed to possibilities for active participation in the benefits of development.


Women and water share a relationship filled with challenges; where women are the water managers within households and irrigation, but where they are also not perceived as active members. For many women in countries like El Salvador, Honduras or Mexico, they are already on the frontline efforts of trying to escape poverty, so lacking access to a natural resource on top of being kept out of discussions around water solutions, only perpetuates their inability to be active participants who have a voice and opinion. Gender inequality is then only pushed further when women have an increased workload, meager opportunities for participation in decision-making, limited access to education, and endure poverty and cultural barriers which work to hinder their involvement, and ultimately block the possibilities of sustainable development for their communities within the water sector and other development areas.
Women are more predominantly associated to having a specific and important role in the domestic or private sphere of water use. Their opinion on how household water is managed or the implications that go into not having access to clean water or its scarcity is infrequently considered or included in water project design. Specifically, water scarcity and poor water quality, as it is experienced in both poor urban and rural regions, through community faucets, water trucks, nearby rivers or irrigation ditches, only complicate the tasks already headed by women; however, these experiences are seldom recorded. Furthermore, men and women have different roles and different experiences within household water dynamics; therefore, although men, women, and children are all impacted by sanitation, hygiene and nutritional effects of water scarcity and lack of access to clean water, it is women who are most benefited by the improvement of water supply and quality in poor urban and rural areas in Latin America, (Bennett, Dávila-Poblete, and Rico 2005). The reason is women are in control of managing water at the domestic level through carrying water and spending large parts of the day waiting for water trucks or the availability of clean water, so, when water is readily available and is free from contamination, it alleviates time for them to become involved in other activities.

Another large challenge women face in gender equality within water management is the lack of acknowledgement that is given to women’s expertise and needs regarding irrigation water management and use. In particular, in rural areas the type of investment and improved irrigation system design implemented is usually gender biased and so they are predominantly designed with only men’s perspective in
mind. Thus, women are left out of irrigation discussions even though rural women in less developed countries in Latin America are the principal basic food producers, who work to conserve soil and water, and assume traditional male responsibilities when their husbands migrate, (United Nations Development Program 2009, 29). Moreover, although women are handed this responsibility within irrigation and agricultural work, they don’t end up having the same or direct access to financial, technological and social resources that men have. Consequently, women find themselves ill prepared during times of climatic crises because they are not integrated into agricultural education or training; this lack of correct gender disaggregated data doesn’t allow for women’s contributions to be fully assessed, appreciated, understood and included in development planning, (Aureli and Brelet 2004, 22).

In addition to the poor importance and acknowledgement given to women’s various roles in water management in the household and irrigated agriculture, the high price of clean water often time creates larger challenges for women and their families. When women are unable to afford water, they suffer from sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and other health-related issues which further marginalize their quality of life. The concern for equity and the commitment to providing more or less water on the basis of the ability to pay affects poor women the most; specifically it’s worthy I note that, “payment for water by the poor does not ensure access to safe, reliable and adequate water because multiple social variables determine access to water… [therefore] the willingness to pay argument may fail to address gender…” (Joshi 2005, 141). In Chapter 3, I will discuss in more detail the role and impact of privatization on women
in Latin America. In the meantime, it’s critical I go deeper into the issue of irrigation and how it produces challenges for women once their husbands, brothers and other males within their households and communities migrate or leave. It is virtually impossible to discuss gender equality gaps in water management and specifically in relation to irrigation, and not discuss some of the most basic issues that shape the precarious relation between women and irrigated agriculture.

To begin, property rights, farming as it relates to irrigation and its perception of it being exclusively a male domain, along with the institutional set-up within which irrigation take place, are all components that further inequality for women in irrigated agriculture, (Ahlers 2000, 205). Throughout Latin America, farming is seen as an activity that is headed by males; as such, the participation of women is regarded as uncommon, however, women are very much involved in irrigated farming. For example, in Ecuador and Peru the percentage of male migration has pushed women to play a significant role in irrigated agriculture; coincidently, they face challenges when trying to access land titles and water rights, which were initially obtained through their male relatives, (Ahlers 2005, 206-210). An example of both formal rights to water and decision making about irrigation was experienced in Bolivia with Lake Totora when the villages of Tiraque and Punata disputed the extension of its supply and distribution; Tiraque argued the project’s initial idea to divert all extra water to Punata, (Zwarteveen and Bennett 2005, 21). In these cases, issues of who controls the water were largely controversial, in particular however Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia were to some extent gendered since both men and women were involved and impacted differently by either
migration or changes in water access laws. However, such water struggles are not necessarily seen through a gender-specific lens, because, “rights to water are often directly linked to rights to land, and gender-based disputes over water are frequently subsumed in struggles over land.” (Zwartveen and Bennett 2005, 21), therefore women’s needs and experiences are lost since men are perceived as the heads of households and better suited to deal with extra household matters. The argument given as to why women are denied land rights and access to land is due to cultural and gender role implications; for example, a woman’s place is in the home or irrigation is a physical activity that is too strenuous and complicated for women to perform. All of these stereotypes perpetuate why women can only access land through inheritance or the redistribution of communal land, (Ahlers 2000, 207).

As profiled, gender inequality is only perpetuated through women’s experiences with water, which are loaded with various challenges in both the domestic and irrigation sector. Very little progress has occurred to move toward a main goal of bringing in water management issues into gender equity discussions and even more toward reducing gender gaps in areas of access, use and management and the various sectors within which women are active, (Dávila-Poblete and Rico 2005, 44). Despite Latin American governments’ efforts to be more inclusive and in-tune to developing a gender approach towards water management solutions, “in practice their work reflects sociocultural gender patterns that assign certain activities to men (primarily in the public sphere and in the area of production) and other activities to women (reproductive work in the domestic sphere),” (Dávila-Poblete and Rico 2005, 45).
Thus, traditional gender roles continue to invade water management projects and so these fail to not only recognize that water is an input for a variety of traditional productive activities for women in Latin America, but also, that women’s roles change within water management and are affected by social movements, such as male migration.

There is a lack of understanding and existing data that exhibit women’s roles in water management; little attention is placed in the inequality women face or the benefits a gender approach can produce in regards to gender equity policies. Women’s experiences require close attention and high importance in order to diminish and create sustainable solutions that can lower poverty rates, address sanitation and hygiene, and nutritional problems being faced in the Latin American region. A greater reason for why gender dynamics are not fully addressed in water-related issues is the lack of linkages between gender and water issues at the governmental level, as it is reflected in civil society in Latin America. As a result, no significant pressure from either the nongovernmental or civil society sectors push to place the water issue as it relates to gender equality on the agenda, (Dávila-Poblete and Rico 2005). Further, advocating for international agreements like those made through the Dublin principles remain absent and not fully implemented as critical to promoting gender equality within water management solutions.

**The Importance of a Gender Mainstream Approach in Water Management**

The international community recognizes the importance of a gender mainstream approach in water management solutions, and more specifically, that
women play a key role within program design. However, this ideology must remain constant and be uniform in all areas of development and within Latin American governments. That it is daunting how women’s considerable knowledge of water resources, both in their experiences with quality, reliability and even storage methods is not effectively addressed by decision makers of water resources development solutions and irrigation projects, is not a surprise. As a matter of fact, “while the rhetoric usually remains intact, in practice gender is highly contested, often misunderstood, and a concept to which many are hostile; is increasingly addressed in the wider context of ‘vulnerability’ or ‘diversity,’ and sometimes ignored altogether,” (Wallace and Wilson 2005, 116). Consequently, the importance of promoting women’s roles has been predominantly held through lip service and so it behooves to aim light into why integrating a gender approach is necessary and beneficial to both men and women in obtaining sustainable water management solutions and creating gender equality.

Thus far, I have discussed and highlighted how critical it is to engage men and women’s roles and experiences into a gender approach that successfully addresses all issues pertaining to water management as they’re associated to both domestic and irrigation (private and public) sectors. A gender mainstream approach recognizes that men and women face different situations within water management, that it places them in positions which allow for different capacities, knowledge and experiences, and also recognizes the different needs, interests and priorities acknowledged by each group,
The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women distinguishes that women are key actors in the development and advocacy of programs that work towards the equality of men and women in the conservation and safeguarding of natural resources, such as water; women are acknowledged as managers, producers, user and even intermediaries in agendas, (Aureli and Brelet 2004, 10). USAID also strongly believes and supports the importance of integrating gender into climate change issues; for example, in Peru, USAID is working with local partners to better integrate gender and women’s roles in adapting to climate change, while in Ecuador, USAID is helping its government involve women more in services related to ecosystems and forest conservation, (USAID 2012).

As noted by international entities, women’s active participation is critical for ensuring the sustainable use of water resources. Women’s roles in water management take on a variety of shapes but have and continue to be only seen in the context of user within the household and communities, even though they carry on larger roles. In particular, in rural areas women and men carry heavy loads of poverty accompanied by water scarcity; women are often obligated to add onto their responsibilities at home when men migrate, and they become farmers and decision-makers, (Tortajada 2000). Consequently, in Latin America and due to women’s new roles, the success of water management must include women’s experiences and place them in larger roles, such as managers, decision makers and planners, so that both men and women’s experiences are linked and equally valued when developing water management solutions for water
scarcity or lack of access to water. Integrating a gender approach that considers and values women’s unique experiences with water will assist in improving the environment and in ensuring that sustainable water management solutions are created that benefit men, women, children and their communities. Through the integration of a gender approach, women’s opinions and perceptions of the specific water issues of predominant concern can be addressed; which will result in magnifying key issues often not mentioned or considered because their voices and opinions have been absent.

**Conclusions**

Indeed, a gender mainstream approach is becoming more visible in international policy statements, and while the Dublin Principles have stipulated and argued in defense of the importance of women’s roles and experiences within water management—much remains to be done to put into effect any concrete and global implementation which accurately and successfully integrates both men and women’s needs and experiences. It is worthy I mention that the participation needed by women cannot be simply written in an agenda or policy and be expected to implement change on its own. On the contrary, a profound cultural change has to permeate in order to generate a participatory approach that allows for the embracing of a process within which the community is empowered and allows gender stereotypes to be broken. Finally, to incorporate a gender perspective into water management in the region of Latin America the following must be addressed:

- An Account of local cultural conventions that condition men and women’s roles and voice within their families, workplace and local communities.
- Realization of the difference in power dynamics between men and women as to who has control over water; and addressing other differences that have an effect in both water use and knowledge, such as age, ethnicity and income.

- Examination of how gender roles are reversed as a result of migration, new laws, new infrastructure or economic development.

- Creating an environment that is welcoming and encourages for both men and women’s opinions, experiences and knowledge in water management to be included is critical, (Bennett 2005).
CHAPTER THREE

PRIVATIZATION AND WATER RIGHTS

Much of what I discussed thus far observed the problems that develop from a lack of access to clean water and in general, how water scarcity impacts women and gender equality. The Latin American region experiences are very similar to many in other parts of the globe; the lack of access to clean water and its scarce presence in communities and households has a plethora of social, health and gender implications which only further drown developing nations into stagnant progress. The unique case of Latin America also brings about an interesting aspect; although it experiences the most annual rainfall than any other region in the world—a water crisis remains where the poor and in particular poor women are experiencing chronic fresh water shortages, (Beeson, 2008). So, why does a region not lacking rainfall, remain thirsty and experiences water scarcity issues? There are many reasons behind such a conundrum; urbanization, deforestation, overpopulation, melting glaciers, and even high technology solutions are just a few that are to blame, (Barlow 2007). However, for Latin America, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has declared that on top of the reasons mentioned above (especially urbanization and overpopulation) much of the reason behind their water crisis problem is that those suffering the most from the water and sanitation crisis are poor people in general and poor women in particular, who often do not have a strong political voice within their governments and communities to assert their claims to water, (UNDP 2009). In fact, according to a UNDP report the
scarcity water problem lies within rooted issues in power, poverty and inequality, not necessarily physical availability; which coincides with Latin America’s history of having one of the most inequitable income distribution rates in the globe.

In Chapter 2, I outlined the lack of engagement and consideration given to gender perspectives in regards to water scarcity and lack of access to clean water. Specifically, I focused a lot on the lack of involvement by women and the little importance given to women’s unique experiences when developing water management solutions. I established the understanding that women and men’s experiences, especially those of poor women, are critical when attempting to develop sustainable water management solutions. Because I discussed this in some depth, in this chapter I will focus on a not-so-recent development in Latin America’s water issues and one which continuously creates controversy amongst water policy makers and water activists: the privatization of water (See Box 4). As such, I will first outline the poor governance and international lending institutions’ activities which have promoted water problems and inequality issues in Latin America; then, I will address how water privatization developed in the global south and how it became a tool for water alleviation; whilst also aiming light into water rights’ controversy (commons versus economic good). In addition, in this chapter I will address the impact and failures of privatizing water and specifically, how it has failed poor women and the movements soaring from Latin America in response to this reform.
**Governance Failure**

In 1992, the fourth Dublin principle stated that, “...water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good,” (Staddon, Appleby and Grant 2012, 67). As a result, water activists and global financial institutions have had a less than agreeable perception on the implications of how water should be treated. In the past several decades, countries like Mexico, Bolivia, Uruguay and El Salvador have endured water crises due to the poor management of their countries’ water systems, which have continuously failed at providing adequate and affordable clean water to its citizens. Cronyism and corruption within governments has perpetually negated the poor the right to water, with women in particular experiencing the biggest burden. The idea of the privatization of water resulted as a response to the poor governance and performance of developing nations, but it didn’t evolve overnight. Therefore, it behooves I aim light to how this system developed as the common tool for water alleviation in the global South.

Water services have not lagged behind for developed parts of the world, like in the global North; the majority of individuals enjoys and has access to water on a daily basis, either for agricultural needs or in the household. As I mentioned in previous

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**Box 4: Privatization**

Privatization of water is a process of expansion of the market that creates new property relations and in so doing generates new society-nature relations. Further, it allows private foreign entities the control of other and usually, poor and/or developing nations’ water through its regulation, pricing and management, Bakker 2010, 30.
chapters, its citizens are not experiencing first-hand the consequences of a dire global water crisis. But, the reality remains that the world is running out of clean water at a dangerous rate, and with rare exceptions, average people aren’t aware that many are dying, starving and even migrating due to water shortages. Political leaders in developing nations of Latin America desperately try to provide adequate access to water but little attention is given to addressing the environmental crisis that has created the pollution of water to begin with, (Barlow 2007). As a result, these governments have accepted the resolutions and proposals forwarded by large financial institutions as the answer to solving their regional water problems, either due to lack of knowledge or due to the high debt owed to developed nations in the global North. But, what have these plans actually entailed and how did they submerge as the default solution?

The World Bank, the United Nations, European Union and other highly influential entities have all devised plans to rescue water for the developing world, but the environmental impact, along with the poorest communities have been highly ignored while profit has remained a key interest. Up until recently, wealthy countries have not been prepared to cancel or even hint at renegotiating the debt owed by the global South to the global North, and so as a result, “every year, more money flows to the global North to pay the debt than flows to the global South in aid and trade together,” (Barlow 2007, 31-32). In fact, by the early 1980s, it was evident that a water crisis of major proportions was developing, in addition to the foreign debt owed to developed nations. In response, the United Nations declared the 1980s the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade and stipulated targets for the provision
of water to the South which was based on a northern model, (Barlow 2007, 36). By the early 1990s, almost a decade later, this new model shifted ideals and specifically, for the developing world, the new model had abandoned a public model for a private one that not coincidentally benefited the pockets of European water companies, (Barlow 2007, 36).

**Privatizing Water**

Despite their dire need, initially the World Bank lent money to only urban water supply projects while rural areas were excluded. Most urban water projects were selected entirely on a region’s ability to recover costs through charging for services—poverty alleviation along with environmental concerns were paid little attention, (Bakker 2010). Specifically, the World Bank, “warned that efficiency and financial and economic sustainability would be difficult to achieve in this sector, in part because lack of ability to pay implied either loss-making projects or the exclusion of large segments of the population,” (Bakker 2010, 66). Consequently, the World Bank was encouraged through the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade to initiate the water sector’s focus into rural areas; ironically, in the latter half of the 1980s these programs’ sustainability became questionable. Also, even though the development community recommended that greater community participation be integrated into water supply management projects as a means to address the bank’s reluctance with how to improve equity of distribution of costs and benefits and maintenance of facilities, not much attention was placed on such recommendations, (Bakker 2010, 67).
In 1992, the Buky Report analyzed the many missed opportunities and failures of the World Bank’s water programs design and implementation in the water supply and sanitation sector. The report provided a particularly poor grade to the bank’s performance in the water sector, thus changing the World Bank’s lending strategy. Further, the report’s criticisms, “…echoed NGO critiques of the Bank, including its bias toward large-scale centralized development projects and the negative impacts of its projects on disadvantaged groups and the environment,” (Bakker 2010, 69). Prior to these findings, the World Bank had begun to develop new policy of development designed to practically force developing poor nations to adopt the economic model of the Washington Consensus. Precisely, what this consensus meant was that, “the World Bank agreed to renegotiate their loans on condition that the countries in question undergo Structural Adjustment Programs that required them to sell off public enterprises and utilities and privatize essential public services…” (Barlow 2007, 38). Consequently, in 1993, the World Bank’s new strategy on water policy had a shift occur in which integrated water resources development and prioritized broader sectorial reform, would move away from previous policies and incidentally decentralize and privatize key elements of its reformed agenda, (Bakker 2010, 69). In return, the World Bank’s emphasis to enable the private sector development, also showed efforts to adopt the Dublin Principles (specifically, principle four which reframed water as an economic good). It is worthy I illustrate that the Washington Consensus had a new set of policies which specifically referred to and included, privatization, deregulation, financial liberalization, and the creation of secure property
rights, amongst other items like tax reform, and the introduction of competition, (Bakker 2010, 72). This new agenda emerged strictly due to the fiscal crises experienced during the 1970s and 1980s, which were characterized by high indebted lower and middle-income governments suffering high inflation rates and negative growth.

After the World Bank’s failed attempt to provide aid to developing countries going through water crises, the private sector became the best answer to generate. In addition, private corporations made the argument that they would ensure what regional governments had failed to do: enable the poor to have access to water because privatized water would allow better performance and efficiency. Shortly after, the World Bank along with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other regional banks such as the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), actively encouraged poor countries to allow large European water companies to run and manage their water systems. By the mid-2000s, most poor countries had no say in the matter as the majority of loans for water were now conditional on privatization leaving Latin American water users purchasing their water from foreign companies, (Barlow 2007). The global South was now encouraged through these various financial mechanisms to adopt a private water services approach; which became a key component of the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (RPSPS). Subsequently, the United Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were used to strategically implement and drive the structured agreements through which poor countries would receive debt relief, (Barlow 2007). It is critical I mention
that through the World Bank’s RPSPS, “poor countries must complete [one]… to receive debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative, which usually takes the form of agreeing to adopt neo-liberal market reforms and promising not to use the aid money for poverty reduction or public services… countries agree instead to promote economic growth through macroeconomic policies and infusions of foreign direct investment as well as the self of state-owned enterprises and utilities,” (Barlow 2007, 41).

In an almost orchestrated format, the World Bank aligned with the United Nations (through the Dublin Principles), and the Kyoto Declaration in 2003, to push forward the consensus that the private sector was best placed to run the water systems in the global South; and corporations were recognized to operate in developing poor nations because they were best suited to aid these nations in providing fair access. As corporations began settling into various countries, the water companies also began to show concern that they were, “not sustainable without guarantees from the international financial institutions that they would be protected from both local political turmoil and currency crises in the countries of Latin America in particular,” (Barlow 2007, 56). As a result, in Financing Water for All, a report written by a panel chaired by Michael Camdessus, a former head of the IMF, water companies received what they had requested; the recognition that corporations operating in poor developing nations needed both political and financial protection, as a result a Liquidity Backstopping Facility was created to guarantee profits in cases of currency devaluation and political conflict. Governments in poor developing nations took in
these recommendations and adopted them as part of their country’s development programs, (Barlow 2007, 57). What would occur next was not entirely what these institutions and water companies expected; they had severely neglected poor communities and the impact of privatization on poor women; water had now become an economic commodity which only those who could afford it would be able to purchase it. This would create massive controversy in the development world and in particular, it would create large protests in various regions of Latin America.

**Water Privatization Failures**

The privatization of water is filled with controversy; as such it is worthy I note the most pertinent impact to gender inequality and the human right access to clean water. The process of water privatization concluded in it becoming the default tool used for water alleviation in developing poor nations. Poor women in particular, who are the water managers, were the last to be consulted throughout this process. In fact, the third Dublin Principle establishes that women are already interrelated within the water sector and it is highly advised they become integral parts of water management development; however, very little progress has been made towards achieving this goal. Privatization has in fact almost denied entirely and exclusively the right to clean water to poor women who must choose between paying for clean water or opting for polluted water due to their inability to pay the prices stipulated by large water companies. What follows are snapshots of various discussions and controversies surrounding privatization and the ways in which some developing nations are addressing water
problems in access and affordability, and the common versus economic good
dichotomy.

*Accountability and Affordability*

Private water companies have left much to desire, as most developing nations
have been dominantly impacted by deregulations, increasing pricing and poor
accountability. Water activist and anti-privatization leader, Vandana Shiva elaborates
on this topic when she adds that, “…as it turns out, there is no indication that private
companies are any more accountable. In fact, the opposite tends to be the case. While
privatization does not have a track record of success, it does have a track record of
risks and failures. Private companies most often violate operation standards and engage
in price gouging without much consequence,” (Shiva 2002, 91). Shiva further argues
that the World Bank advocacy for private-public partnerships for example, usually
disguise the arrangements of using public funds for the privation of public goods, with
the idea of public participation, water democracy and accountability; but that what
really occurs is millions of aid dollars are funneled to private enterprises who are in the
water business to replace water services, and not necessarily serve and protect the
environment and, or, provide access to clean water to the poor communities they are
there to help, (Shiva 2002, 89-90).

Water privatization policy assumed this process would enable the poor to pay
less per unit volume of water and in return service quality would occur. The logic was
that if households that relied heavily on expensive and poor quality alternatives like
wells or private water vendors (like water trucks), extending water networks would
assist in providing access. However, instead privatization proponents missed to acknowledge that new connections need finance, which result in cost-recovery pricing that later imposes the full costs on the user, (Bakker 2010, 98). Poor women make up a large proportion of these users and the impact on them is detrimental as they are the water managers within their households and communities. Communal networks, which are not integrated into the policy and framework of water privatization, would allow for decentralization of water management which in return invites the environment that allows for women participants. In effect, “when decentralization is effective, it ensures that services are appropriate for local needs, that operation and maintenance requirements are met and that facilities created are sustained over time,” (World Health Organization 2012, 21). However, it is critical to keep in mind that effective decentralization requires that concrete and adequate technical, human resources and financial support be provided to local authorities and key stakeholders. Moreover, “communal water management with attention to empowering women and environmental sustainability is not only compatible within a globalized economy; it is also aided by international partnerships of information and technology sharing…it is essential to appreciate the distinct role that women play in both their communities and effective water management,” (Guslits and Phartiyal 2010, 13). Recognizing that control of water translates into both economic and political power, should be one of the main, if not most pertinent reasons in advocating for water to be viewed as a commons; empowering civil society at its foundation will allow to bring about equity within poor communities to own and manage their own livelihoods and thus produce sustainability.
Lastly, when we evaluate gender dynamics and the impact of privatization on both men and women, we discover that water privatization creates pricing hikes that have different implications for both men and women and within the household and in irrigated agriculture. This result in both men and women having to opt or be forced to use polluted water as it can be free or discounted, thus inviting poor sanitation and hygiene problems already embedded by poverty living standards. Water privatization also fails because unmet needs in water cannot be addressed and measured by the amount of water purchased; instead the assessment of demand and its implications on issues of scarcity and sanitation and hygiene must be, at the very least, consulted with both men and women within communities experiencing water problems in order to effectively monitor and evaluate equal water access. The reasoning behind this is that even though poor women place and hold a high priority on accessibility to clean water, and men may hold other areas of water as pertinent, they each view and experience need and scarcity differently through their attached roles within water management. Meaning, women may face challenges in household water, such as having to walk long distances and so they may opt for a well to be close to their communities. Whereas men, who do not understand or engage in household water issues, may find having a well close to home unnecessary and, or may instead choose a less costly solution that places water far away from their homes, (Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water 2004, 16).
Commons versus Economic Good

As I outlined earlier, the privatization of water as a commodity was imposed on the global South through the Dublin Principles and was subsequently imposed by large financial organizations and foreign water companies. Water privatization advocates argued that commoditization would help implement means to address water scarcity and that as a result better care of natural resources would be vested through financial interests. Yet, this ideal has redefined water as a product that can be bought and sold in the market, or a commodity and economic good. In other words, water has gone from being a commons—a public good that is a non-substitutable natural resource essential for life—to a product that should be marketed and sold, like any other merchandise. Worthy of noting is that when water is deregulated, private companies do not experience the consequences for lack of efficiency or performance. In addition, water companies in return often deliberately exclude the poorest demographics in order to increase profitability, as they must answer to shareholders, not water users who are eventually acknowledged as only customers, (Guslits and Phartiyal 2010, 13). Other criticisms of valuing water as an economic good are of ethical nature; in particular, viewing water as a commodity is of ethical concern because it ignores the impact of negating a resource that when absent, creates sanitation and hygiene issues, deprives life and perpetuates poverty in already indebted and poor developing nations in the global South.

In privatizing water and labeling it an economic good or a commodity, the idea and agenda to push the human right to water developed. Consequently, in July 2010
the United Nations General Assembly adopted the human right to water; with this new added aspect for water, experts and activists argued that a moral and ethical ideological dilemma would surface. When water is viewed as a human right or separately, as an economic good, a troubling consequence occurs, as these labels place them in close proximity. In other words, when water is guaranteed as human right, private water companies have used this as their reason in privatizing water services. Their argument has been that because local governments have failed in providing this human right resource, it is their moral duty to assist them in providing access. Alternatively, viewing water as a human right can also coincide with the idea of water as a commons, which allows for communal management as it is seen as a public good. In effect, simply stating that water is a human right doesn’t necessarily equate to implying it should be free, but it is my argument to promote that one, water should be affordable and reasonably priced with close consideration given to vulnerable groups of people within poor communities, such as poor women; and two, that water should be managed as a commons where communities input and experiences, especially those of poor women are taken into consideration. Specifically, “the recognition of a human right to water at the national policy level has also lacked the necessary teeth to improve standards of living for vulnerable populations,” (Guslits and Phartiyal 2010, 13), in other words, it is important to keep in mind that this recognition will only go as far as governments are willing to enforce it; especially when the private sector proves to be ineffective in managing accessibility and reducing inequities.
Lastly, in the case against the commodification of water, Barlow outlines three major problems that develop as a result of abandoning water as a commons and which are useful in supporting my overall thesis’ theory. The first problem with viewing water as an economic good is that there is simply no profit in the conservation of the environment. In fact, the private water industry benefits from the world’s water crisis because it allows them to have a hold of a market that is needed for survival—it is essentially a life-time market that will always have a consumer or costumer. Also, governments, private water companies and even universities are heavily investing, “in the burgeoning water clean-up technology industry, [therefore] there is less and less incentive at every level to emphasize source protection and conservation,” (Barlow 2007, 11). Consequently, any rules or regulations strategically placed to protect the environment cannot disrupt the relationship between private businesses and governments; governments are then forced to lower standards to keep private enterprise within their countries. A second problem is that nature doesn’t have anyone or anything attempting to purchase or invest in its ecosystems’ survival. Meaning, because there is no regulatory oversight or government control there are really no protections to safeguard ecosystems from water pillage; in reality poor developing nations’ governments have little knowledge of their groundwater sources, so private interests control water supplies while governments and the public have little to say, (Barlow 2007, 11). As a result, nature is ultimately disenfranchised and in return it becomes essentially a commodity in which only those can afford it, can enjoy it. The third problem with viewing water as an economic good is that only the rich will have
access to clean water, thus violating the UN’s human right to water. Particularly, the problem, “with the commodification of water is that water, and water infrastructure—from drinking water and sanitation utilities services, to bottled water, clean-up technologies and nuclear-powered desalination plants—will flow where the money is, not where it is needed,” (Barlow 2007, 12).

In May 2007, “Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua announced their decision to withdraw from the World Bank’s International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, in no small measure because of the way the big water corporations have used the center to sue for compensation when the countries terminated private delivery contracts,” (Barlow 2007, 103). In an article by the Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS), covering water privatization in Latin America, it is mentioned that several countries have enshrined the right to water in their constitutions, with Uruguay leading as a pioneer and creating a referendum in which voters elected to make water a national asset for the public good, (Ortiz 2011). That Latin America with its water abundance should have one of the highest per capita allocations of water in the world, but instead it has one of the lowest due to calls inequalities, polluted water and water privatization has been of much debate. The following examples showcase citizen’s range of involvement in their fight for significant progress in water rights and their opposition to privatization. It’s also worthy I note that these battles for the right to water are continuous as they are faced with much speculation and debates on how water should be handled under various governments. A deeper analysis of country experiences in both Mexico and Bolivia will be presented in Chapter 4 which will
outline both the continuing struggles of the poor and the progress that has slowly developed in the battle for the right to water.

**Ecuador:** In its most populated city, Guayaquil, a concession for drinking water and sewage services was granted to a Spanish water company, Proactiva Medio Ambiente. As of 2008 although Ecuador’s constitution has now established water as a national good for public use which can only be managed by public or community-based enterprises—the Spaniard company in question and a second South American company, remain in power and are active, (Ortiz 2011). Citizens continue to fight for better and more equal rights to water, but much remains to be accomplished.

**El Salvador:** In one of the largest public demonstrations since the peace accords in 1992, at least 25,000 people marched in defense of their right to water and against the privatization of their water systems. An interesting mix of groups and industry unions marched together; women’s groups, industry workers, environmental organizations and even sex workers were amongst the groups. In the array of groups it was clear to see water affected everyone, regardless of profession or gender, (Beeson, 2008).

**Argentina:** Under the government of Néstor Kirchner, Agua y Saneamiento Argentinos (AySA) was established to serve the greater Buenos Aires area which reaches nearly 10 million people. This occurred as a result of the French water utility company Suez’s failure in meeting its obligations to the citizens of Argentina after having been contracted for 30 years, (Ortiz 2011). Women participated in protesting against the failures of this French company, but in Argentina in particular, women have
led a large role in water activism, even though they have lacked access to financial and 
economic decision-making. More on the role of women in protests this will be 
analyzed in Chapter 4.

Conclusions

As recognized in earlier chapters, it is my position to promote water democracy through community-based and decentralized water conservation, which is politically and culturally inspired rather than economically motivated. In addition, the possibility of private-public partnerships could assist in providing affordable and efficient water services that do not discriminate and, or, negate access to clean water to the most vulnerable in poor communities, in particular women. Addressing water as a commons and human right does have its dilemma, but water completely loses its human factor when it is marketed as a product that only the rich can purchase and enjoy. Thus, by collaborating and engaging the most affected and well-versed in the water scarcity problems in regions of Latin America (in particular poor women), and by including fair and regulated policy that integrates both public and private management, water can become a sustainable natural source that is shared by citizens. Lastly, involving environmental expertise and protecting our natural water sheds and rivers is of critical importance if humans are to enjoy and conserve water. Otherwise, the world, in particular poor developing nations, will continue to face water crises that are only perpetuated when private foreign companies put profit ahead of human existence and environmental conservancy. In conclusion, integrating a gendered perspective that views women as high key stakeholders; eliminating water from a business policy plan,
and instead integrating it as a commons which is treated as a human right, citizens in developing nations can address their water problems while becoming empowered and having both political and economic authority over their livelihoods and the wellbeing of their families and future generations.
CHAPTER FOUR
COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN LATIN AMERICA: BOLIVIA AND MEXICO

In Latin America water privatization has created an impact that is felt in various countries that have organized to fight against the reform. Water activists have organized in the hopes that building national and regional movements will help in protecting their natural resources from being managed and outsourced to foreign entities. Through the many protests, we have witnessed that water has the ability of bringing together a variety of mixed entities; such as women’s groups, community organizations and environmental protectionists. Because water troubles are common throughout this region of the world, their citizens are increasingly joining forces to channel their frustration and experiences with problems of access, inability to pay and contamination, (Beeson 2008). In all, water privatization’s poor performance and price hikes have rapidly created discontent amongst various vulnerable communities; Mexico and Bolivia have been particularly involved in massive movements to eradicate privatization to claim water rights as both human rights and as a source of livelihood. In this chapter, I will provide a close look at the events that led up to the privatization of water in both Mexico and Bolivia, and how each country managed its impact on the most vulnerable populations, like the poor and women in particular. Both of these countries showcase ideal examples of the type of involvement led by women and the impact of privatization on vulnerable communities already battling poverty. Although each country carries separate cultural and political dynamics, they share similar impact and experiences in their need for water for all.
Monterrey, Mexico: Urban Women as Protagonists of Change

Mexico is known for welcoming privatization across the region and allowing the elite full control of all the water and access as well; in addition, with 12 million Mexicans without access to potable water the only option left for many is purchasing water from water trucks, thus leaving the poor without any access at all, (Barlow 2007, 107). The region of Monterrey is one of the most important industrial parts of Mexico and one of the most populated. It is also strategically located only a three hour’s drive south of the border with Texas, making it one of the most competitive industrial bases in Mexico, which has led as a primary motor to the export economy. However, as popular as its city has been in advancing economic opportunities for the country, Monterrey has endured a water crisis whose history begins in the early 1950s and one which has portrayed the relations of power, gender, privatization and government failure. For major cities in Latin America, water availability is a necessary condition that invites progress and showcases modernity; however, most cities in this region do not adequately provide or have the water infrastructure to provide home water services to all their residents. In fact, for a city which sits as the second largest industrial city next to Mexico City, I think it is interesting to view its long period of water crisis and the protests that derived from the poor government investment made in the city’s water infrastructure. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the city of Monterrey witnessed population growth at a rapid rate, which in return exposed the water services’ deficiencies which later led to urban protests, (Bennett 1995, 33). I will now provide a synopsis of the events that led to the urban protests in which women were integral
components of raising attention to the water problem and the city’s poor water management.

*Building up a Water Crisis*

In the 1900s it was common in Mexico to turn to foreign companies for assistance in construction, ownership and management of natural resources or other cities’ infrastructures. Monterrey’s water system for example, was owned and operated by the Canadian private firm, Mackenzie, Mann, and Company until 1945. The actual contract was for 100 years or until 2008, however, as Monterrey’s population grew rapidly; its citizens found that only half of them were receiving potable water from the municipal system, (Bennett 1995, 182). In fact, the city’s population had expanded by 146 percent during the years of 1909 to 1949, and the water system had only expanded by 64 percent; further, with an increase in industrial and commercial activity, Monterrey could no longer survive with the old 1909 stipulations of the original contract. Consequently, in the early 1940s the state government of Nuevo León confronted the Canadian company over not only the failure to meet its contractual obligations, but also for fraudulent bookkeeping that allowed the water company to make more than 10 percent of its original accumulated investment, (Bennett 1995, 36). After much dispute and disagreement between Monterrey’s government and the water company, a legal battle ensued; in which the state government won and the relationship between the two entities ended completely with the state negotiating the purchase of the Canadian company.
By 1945 the state government of Nuevo León had purchased the water company from its Canadian owners. Although the intentions of nationalizing the water company were good, the water sector would now be managed by the Banco Mercantil de Monterrey, not exactly the best suited entity to run a water company or manage its future water problems. From 1945 to 1956, financial and administrative business failures and ineptness all contributed to an overall decline in services and unpreparedness for population growth and future drought. Throughout this time, the city of Monterrey experienced severe drought and a water crisis that forced the city to ration water all year round; population grew but their needs went unmet as water projects didn’t come into effect successfully. As a response to the continuous problems, in 1954 the president of Mexico created the Comisión de Agua Potable de Monterrey (CAPM, the Potable Water Commission of Monterrey). Originally, the commission was to contain exclusive responsibility for any technical and financial planning necessary to improve the city’s water supply and distribution; its board of directors was initially made up of five government representatives, three representatives from the private sector, and one member representing the citizens of Monterrey (although this membership was appointed directly by the state governor), (Bennett 1995, 38). I should add that even though Monterrey had the right technical teams to develop water management solutions, after more than 15 years studying the region’s water problems, the designing of complex water infrastructure projects never came to fruition.
By the early-to-mid 1970s, Monterrey’s water service and infrastructure’s future was now in the hands of the Commission’s board of directors; their now private sector group, were members of the most elite families within the Grupo Monterrey and were also industrialists or real estate developers, (Bennett 1995, 184). A problematic scenario invited underrepresentation and monopoly within the Commission, as government representatives stopped attending meetings and the private sector members became dominant figures within the Commission’s decision-making. In addition, although members were aware of the city’s water crisis and the rapid growth of water problems in poor neighborhoods, “…water infrastructure projects were heavily skewed to the western portion of the city, which housed the majority of upper-income neighborhoods in Monterrey…the northern and eastern sectors of the metropolitan area…had the majority of low-income neighborhoods, and had the most deficient water infrastructure…” (Bennett 1995, 184). As water problems continued, the Mexican government responded by channeling tens of billions of pesos into two projects; the Hydraulic Plan, which included building the largest dam for urban water use in Mexico; and the Water for All program which sole purpose was to extend water services to homes in poor neighborhoods, (Bennett 2000, 100). These projects would take years to complete, while in the meantime, water service for the residents of Monterrey only deteriorated. The urban poor in Monterrey mobilized to protest during the 1970s and 1980s due to central issues of both water and housing; land invasions and water scarcity and lack of access, perpetuated discontent amongst the most affected, and in particular with women.
Urban Women in Water Protests

In Latin America, protesting and mobilizing to bring attention to failed government acts, is a feature of daily life. The protests over water in Monterrey were most intense during two periods, 1978 to1980 and 1982 to1983 and proved to showcase the voices of civil society and in particular of urban poor communities who were experiencing the biggest brunt by the lack of effective governing; bad decision-making; lack of service; changes in levels of service; and who opposed overall to government policy, (Bennett 1995, 104). Specifically, the role of women in protests over water in Monterrey is worthy of further analysis, as they became protagonists of social activism during a time when women were not considered relevant or key stakeholders in water management issues of scarcity and lack of access to clean potable water. Women’s increasing involvement in water management has been integral to both national and local efforts which have helped counter Mexico’s economic crises and neoliberal reforms of water management, (Ennis-McMillan 2005, 137). Poor women and in this case, poor urban women became by default the protagonists due to the direct impact they experience during inadequate water services; this is because, “...women’s needs are inadequately represented or addressed by formal political institutions such as political parties...[consequently] protest has become the public voice of poor urban women,” (Bennett 2000, 101). Also, it is imperative I note that women’s roles as not only water managers, but also social managers of activism becomes more difficult under conditions of poverty, as class and gender intersect.
As I have outlined throughout previous chapters, women and men experience and are impacted by water scarcity issues in different ways; in particular, gender roles assign duties and perpetuate stereotypes that only disable women’s abilities to be accounted for as key stakeholders in water management and negate participation within political life. In the case of Monterrey, women were being directly affected at the household level by the lack of water; and although men were involved in various protests, women took it upon themselves to bring attention to their needs. In Monterrey throughout the 1970s, as a consequence to the inconsistent and irregular water supply in the city, women began protesting against the poor service and lack of potable water. Lower-middle income households were very much present during protests and poor women within these areas were prominently involved. Precisely during the years from 1973 to 1985, women first began discussing the problem amongst themselves, at collective faucets, in the street or at neighborhood meetings. Women attempted to negotiate with government officials but were constantly ignored. During the timeframe mentioned above, women were the protagonists during the majority of protests, in fact, “in eight of the nine years when protests occurred on public space, women were the primary participants in more than half the protests each year…sometimes they [women] were the sole participants…. ” (Bennett 1995, 114). Some of the strategies used involved upsetting the day-to-day lives of locals by blocking streets, paralyzing traffic and disrupting industry and commerce; water-service truck drivers were kidnapped (usually by not allowing them to move their trucks into neighborhoods), and rallying at the governor’s palace. Police were usually called during street blockades to
remove the women from protesting, but many couldn’t use force as the women usually had their children with them, (Bennett 2000, 109). In addition, housewives began stopping water-service vehicles with the intention to interrupt repair work, meter reading, and any other water delivery efforts to other neighborhoods. As protests were reported, engineers found themselves in difficult positions of deciding to allow water to flow to affected neighborhoods, which meant taking it away from others, (Bennett 2000, 109).

Lastly, I should note that even though Mexico suffered an economic crisis brought on by corruption and over borrowing, the project Water for All, “…was designed, approved and implemented to fill these gaps despite the fact that the federal government was slashing social spending and carrying out austerity programs mandated by the International Monetary Fund,” (Bennett 2000, 116). I should also mention that many of the lower income neighborhoods affected by water problems during this time in Monterrey had emerged in the land invasion that witnessed rural families migration to urban areas; “…thousands of families who participated in land invasions developed a social and political consciousness as they lived out the connection between class struggle theory praxis….,” (Bennett 1995, 123). Although it was primarily lower income neighborhoods who experienced the biggest impact of rationed water and scarcity, it’s critical I mention that women with very different incomes and histories all faced similar water service problems and utilized similar strategies to protest, as it became clear that water was a universal need within their city and when one neighborhood was affected, it trickled down to other sectors as well.
Low-income residents, and in particular, poor women who were normally overlooked and ignored during policy making in water management issues, became social actors who used protest and other tactics to communicate their needs and frustrations with their government. A strong reason behind women’s movement to protest was due to the fact that they were the first to feel the impact of deficient public services in their water services. Finally, women’s leadership in these protests established demand for change in the distribution of water and upgrade in the entire city’s water system; secondly, through their actions, women in Monterrey became active members of social change instead of passive and ignored entities within their communities, in fact, “by constituting themselves as the active subjects of social change, women in Monterrey asserted their rights as citizens to have a voice, and at the same time identified decent water service as the right of all citizens,” (Bennett 1995, 126). I will now discuss the relations of power within water management in this particular case in Monterrey and how they explain the dichotomy of political history.

Relations of Power in Monterrey

Monterrey exemplifies my overall argument in the failures of water privatization. For example, although the original contract was intended to protect and support the water system to match population growth, the Canadian private company didn’t have the city’s public interest as its main objective—it’s main objective was profit. Government regulation has to be a critical component of privatized public services if they are to be effective in keeping the public interests a primary objective because, “otherwise, civil society will find itself without an advocate if the government
does not enforce the private firm’s contractual obligation to provide adequate services,” (Bennett 1995, 183). Further, it is also as important I clarify that in many countries of Latin America, and specifically in Mexican cities, the government doesn’t always showcase much preference or loyalty to the public interest. Having said this, due to Mexico’s highly centralized nature of policy making, public service problems within Mexican cities become not only municipal issues but also involve and impact state and federal government. As such, it behooves I provide some insight into the relations of power that exist within water management in the case of Monterrey.

First, I should explain that the case of Monterrey defines that water services is a political history that engages the relationships of major political actors, of which these are made up of high-level government leaders, the private sector elite, and poor women in low-income neighborhoods. Indeed, “it provides a lens through which to view relationships between political actors in Mexico, changes in those relationships over time, and the interplay between relations of power and the planning of public services,” (Bennett 1995, 187). The relationships that developed between the Grupo Monterrey and the government, and that of low-income residents (women in particular) and the government proved to outline how power struggles fought to bring water needs and demands to light. Specifically, because Mexico has a highly centralized political system with power concentrated within the presidency, “centralization has resulted in tremendous imbalances of power between federal, state, and local governments, as well as in distortions within the planning and budgeting process,” (Bennett 1995, 164). Furthermore, centralization in combination with the failure of the private sector in
Monterrey proved to lay high water prices on the residents and sometimes, no service at all. However, once the federal government allowed their relationship with the Grupo Monterrey (private sector elite) to not be a main priority, and focused on their responsibility to provide water services to the most vulnerable in Monterrey, the context of both conflict and division shifted for the better and for the benefit of the public good, (Bennett 1995, 170-171). The power struggle between the citizens of Monterrey and their government proved to be highly focused on one problem only: water scarcity and poor service. The majority of the protesters were mainly poor women who did not group as one feminist assembly; instead, they formed locally and within neighborhoods to demand water rights, which later trickled down to impact other local areas in Monterrey also experiencing water problems. In the end, the government’s main response was to improve and provide water services to these low-income neighborhoods—low-income women had managed to alter the relations of power and demanded to be heard in a process where they were highly ignored and often dismissed. Although their movement was a social struggle as women were not integrated into the final process of decision-making for water infrastructure, their demands proved that they were a force that used demand-oriented protests to strategize and demand water rights for their households. Latin American nations would mimic much of the protest strategies used in Monterrey in years to come.

**Bolivia: Water Privatization Fails the Poor**

Perhaps one of the largest and most well-known anti-privatization events in Latin America is the ‘water war’ of Cochabamba of 2000. Essentially what occurred is
that Aguas del Tunari, a consortium led by the U.S. water giant Bechtel, increased minimum water rates to almost $20 a month; in a country where the minimum wage provides on average less than $100, it was only a matter of time before Bolivians experienced cut-off services due to unpaid water bills. Consequently, after almost 200 deaths, the government was forced to close the contract and in 2009, Bolivia’s constitution enshrined access to safe and affordable water as a basic and human right to all its citizens, (Ortiz 2011). Water scarcity and lack of access to clean water has been an issue of dispute in Cochabamba long before locals understood the meaning of privatization or knew of the company, Bechtel. In fact, the once wealthy, lush and silver-filled Bolivian mountains that bankrolled the Spanish empire became a thing of the past by the mid-1900s. It was in the 1950s that the city of Cochabamba began experiencing a rapid population growth that topped years later in 2001 at half a million, (Shultz 2008, 11). In the pages that follow, I will outline the sequential turn of events that lead to Bolivia’s infamous water war; I will provide historical background on how privatization became Cochabamba’s failed solution to its water problems and how such problem developed; and showcase the social movement that drove Bolivians to protest and demand the right to water for all, whilst also giving importance to the role women played in coordinating and voicing their concerns and dissatisfaction with their government’s inefficient water services and management. Although their battle is far from over, Bolivia established itself on the map as a country whose people would fight for their right to water regardless of the consequences and struggles that would derive.
Water Scarcity and Privatization

By the late 1990s Bolivia was experiencing an economic collapse which was forcing rural villages to migrate in massive amounts to the city of Cochabamba. Once settled, new neighborhoods were rising across the hillsides of the city; and although many of the new transplants could live without electricity, telephones or gas pipes, they quickly realized they could not live without water. It was during this time that the city of Cochabamba was experiencing a water crisis of high proportion—the city was running out of water and the demand was increasing exponentially, (Shultz 2008, 11).

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, water scarcity can be a result of overpopulation demands, deforestation and severe drought; all of these components were the culprit in Cochabamba’s water problem. As the problem progressed people began drilling wells, thus exhausting the already fragile water table underneath the city; others instead opted to purchase water at incredibly high prices from water trucks, while the majority of the people living in lower-income sections of the city were forced to resort to carrying heavy buckets of water. Those involved in digging wells and developing other alternatives, created water committees and cooperatives to manage their water. Before I continue, I would like to emphasize that these water committees and cooperatives not only developed as a result of the precarious presence of the government in rural areas, but that these groups involved both men and women who worked in technical and operational tasks of water access and distribution—women have played a central role as migration has forced women to manage both household and agricultural aspects of water, (Bustamante, Peredo, and Udaeta 2005, 75-76).
In addition to the massive water crisis, Bolivia was also experiencing chronic poverty that had the nation placed as the poorest nation in South America, which in return pushed the country into deeper debt because it didn’t have the resources to provide more water into the valley through dams and other pipeline investments. It was during the 1960s that Bolivia’s government, along with a secured $14 million water development loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), was required (amongst other conditions), to establish the public water company, Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado (SEMAPA), (Shultz 2008, 13). Throughout its inception up until the 1990s, SEMAPA was unable to keep up with Cochabamba’s rapid influx from the countryside; in addition, much of the water expansion focused heavily on the wealthier neighborhoods in the city, completely ignoring the much poorer neighborhoods. Consequently, due to SEMAPA’s poor management and negligence of poorer areas, communities organized to solve their water problem through the creation of independent water committees; residents began digging wells and laid out pipes to get water and manage it collectively as communities, (Shultz 2008, 13). Although both the government and local communities were attempting to create long-term water solutions, the ever-growing water crisis was beyond immediate repair. Damns, tunnels and wells were all attempts by SEMAPA through various IDB lending techniques to ease the water crisis, but this would only invite the demand for water privatization by the World Bank.

Frustrated with SEMAPA’s little progress and poor performance, the World Bank—who also financed Bolivia’s water programs throughout the 1980s and 1990s—
economists and analysts developed a new strategy to solve the problem of access to water to poor—privatization. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the World Bank made the privatization of public water systems a requirement and condition for getting water funds, and countries in Latin America, such as Bolivia were left with little choice over the matter. In order to receive a $600 million foreign debt relief, the president of Bolivia stipulated that as part of this relief, Cochabamba’s public water system had to be privatized, (Shultz 2008, 15). Therefore, in 1999 the government of Bolivia put out the bid for their public water system with only one enterprise coming forth—Aguas del Tunari, created exclusively by the U.S. water giant, Bechtel who had also created a Long-based company called International Waters Limited (IWL). Essentially, “the contract gave Bechtel and its co-investors control of the city’s water company for forty years and guaranteed them an average profit of 16 percent for each one of those years, to be financed by the families of Cochabamba,” (Shultz 2008, 16). As a result of this business deal, the rights of the water committees and irrigation organizations who had taken it upon themselves to control their water as the government had repeatedly failed them were in danger of losing their rights. As a matter of fact, law 2029 was passed shortly after the privatization of SEMAPA, which stipulated in its provisions that concessions would have not only exclusivity over right in provision and sanitation services, but that these water committees and cooperatives would no longer have exclusive membership therefore establishing temporary licenses for five years, (Bustamante, Peredo and Udaeta 2005, 78). The reaction by water committees and other peasant organizations would begin shortly after these agreements through
roadblocks and demands that the social sectors in Cochabamba be given respect and importance in the city’s water resources. Negotiations fell through, leaving the peasant sector’s demands unresolved, thus enticing them to join forces with other city organizations angry about both water tariffs and poor access to water, (Bustamante, Peredo, Udaeta 2005, 79). As I explained in Chapter 3, although privatization promises to increase accessibility through better water systems and management, it fails to acknowledge that such improvements need financing, which ultimately fall upon the consumer; and so in the case of Cochabamba, this scenario is portrayed when water tariffs are increased so severely in order to cover the costs of future improvements.

Privatization Fails Cochabamba

Initially, due to factors such as chronic poverty, drought, and overpopulation demands that far outnumbered the city of Cochabamba’s ability to provide water to all its old and new transplant members, privatization (pushed on as a solution by the World Bank), came to Bolivia as a good theory that read well on paper, but that soon failed at establishing effective and affordable water solutions. Indeed, the plan by the World Bank proclaimed that, “…multinational corporations…would deliver three things that impoverished countries desperately needed—strong managers, skilled technical experts, and investment expansion of service,” (Shultz 2008, 39-40). Instead, however, Aguas del Tunari (managed and owned by Bechtel), tripled the price of water, cutting off the access to water to all those who could not pay its incredibly high prices; while the rights of irrigation canals built by rural area farmers were being lost and handed over to Bechtel—the Coalition in Defense of Water and Life formed and
began organizing, (Barlow 2007, 104). This coalition was also known as the Coordinadora and its leaders strongly believed that their government leaders had failed at protecting their public interest.

The Cochabamba revolt began in the countryside as a result of the rights that many were losing over the privatization of SEMAPA; “as 1999 ended and 2000 began, Coordinadora leaders spread out to neighborhoods and communities across the valley, armed with presentations on large paper notepads about the threat they saw coming,” (Shultz 2008, 17). It wouldn’t be long before city residents would also experience the new water systems’ regulations, and were faced with almost 50 percent price increases—they joined the Coordinadora movement to block the city and demand a rollback in water rates and repeal not only its new law, but also cancel the privatization contract with Bechtel. Although roadblocks were nothing new to the city of Cochabamba, nothing like this had ever been experienced. The entire city was shut down for three days; the airport was closed, bus services were suspended and thousands of protesters occupied the city’s central plaza to demonstrate their serious disappointment and commitment to push its government to cancel the privatization contract, (Shultz 2008). At the end of the three days, the government had agreed to take a close look at not only the new water rates, but also new water law, promising to return with a proposal in three weeks.

By February the new government of President Hugo Banzer Suárez (a once coup-installed dictator from 1971-1978), had not committed to its promise; Coordinadora leaders decided to stage a symbolic demonstration in central plaza.
However, Cochabamba’s regional governor, a Banzer appointee, announced that it was
time the government showed force against the protesters; and for two days the city’s
colonial center plaza became a war zone-like stage. At first, the government announced
a rollback for six months over Bechtel’s objections; but after a final battle in April
2000 that involved arrests and many wounded, the Coordinadora made its final
demands clear once again. Finally, on the afternoon of April 10, 2000, the government
made the final and anticipated announcement that the contract was no longer valid,
(Shultz 2008). Bolivians cheered in the streets for their victory that echoed and made
the World Bank question its privatization policy; and although this revolt didn’t change
water policies as a whole, it has invited an open and more liberal debate of how this
natural life-giving source should be treated.

Women in the Water War

It is virtually impossible to imagine Bolivia’s water revolt without giving
considerable recognition to the work and participation of women. Because of the closer
relationship that women and water have, their participation was expected; in addition,
although the region’s diverse population experienced a variety of water-related
problems based on social, geographic and cultural location—women’s direct impact
was synonymous throughout the region and influenced their position to get involved.
In Bolivia, increased migration to major cities, like Cochabamba, has placed women in
central positions within water management, and as a result agricultural water
management tasks have been feminized, (Bustamante, Peredo, and Udaeta 2005, 76).
Moreover, as I explained in Chapter 2, the majority of water rights remain in men’s
hands and is a direct result of both cultural and social factors; consequently, women’s absence in leadership roles have much to do with education levels, time limitations and cultural beliefs.

In the case of Bolivia, however, women played a fundamental role in not only the mobilizations but also in being integral in the demands developed by the infamous Coordinadora movement and committee. Specifically, according to some of the main women protagonists in the Cochabamba Water War, some of their duties included: providing backup assistance and act as watch people during blockade periods; resisting police repression through talking with police enforcement and sometimes making up stories to prevent arrests; providing wet cloths dipped in vinegar to protesters so they could continue standing during tear gas attacks; and finally, in cooking in communal kitchens to supply food to the communities coordinating to protest, (Bustamante, Peredo, and Udaeta 2005, 82). Even though many of the women faced prejudice and social discrimination from many who didn’t think they were pertinent to the movement, women used their sensitivity to the water abuses to link their need to become social actors and protagonists. Many women understood the sacrifices they had to make to get involved; as they left behind their homes and crops, their understanding and recognition that water was integral to their family’s livelihood and survival, encouraged them to block streets, become organizers and participate in enabling their voices be heard against privatization. Finally, it’s imperative I mention that women irrigators in Cochabamba experienced a sense of self-valorization, in which they were able to recognize—through heavy involvement—how critical their
roles and opinions are to the water rights movement; their experiences generated a new-found commitment to not only their communities, but also to their roles within water organizations as not only user of water within households, but also as key stakeholders who have the right and capacity to be associated and given higher stake.

Certainly, the years after the revolt initiated a new era for Bolivian politics; the Washington consensus that once dominated Bolivian economics were shaken to the core; however, Cochabamba still faces water challenges as it population continues to grow. One of the most pertinent failures with privatization is its ability to hand over the complete rights over a resource essential to life to corporations; and so it is interesting to see that although the World Bank deemed the Bolivian government unfit to manage its water resources, it was competent to negotiate the handover of its water to a huge foreign company. Lastly, Cochabamba’s revolt did allow for SEMAPA to recover its public status with greater control by the public to participate and control its board of directors; amendments were drafted to modify the Law on Water, guaranteeing recognition of small farmer water systems; and readjustments of tariffs were stipulated. Nevertheless, rapid population growth, SEMAPA’s partial public financing which subjects tax increases, and the ongoing battle from Bechtel to be compensated due to Bolivia’s government cancelation of their contract, is still currently problematic and adds to the obstacles water rights efforts face in Bolivia, (Bustamante, Peredo, and Udaeta 2008, 86).
Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided a short synopsis of the experiences two separate Latin American countries have had in relation to both water privatization and the important involvement led by women within water rights. The battle of water privatization versus water for life, water as a commons or human right is a continuous one. In Mexico, we witnessed a country whose history has perpetuated privatization as the most logical option, perhaps due to its proximity to the United States and its closer relationship with corruption and poor government practices. Power relations showed that in a country whose political dynamics are ruled by the elite and their interests, the poor are often neglected as key benefactors. However, in Bolivia, the poorest country in South America and one raided with chronic poverty and other social issues; water rights became the ultimate insult to people’s dignities in the fight for human survival. I explained how although the World Bank and IDB worked relentlessly to provide funding to water projects in a country already suffering drought and overpopulation, the push for privatization simply ripped away any rights that farmers and other citizens had developed and enforced themselves, as solutions to their governments’ failure in providing water assistance and access. The cultural and power dynamics within these two countries showcase the importance given to the elite, the negligence of governments to their people and their inability to discontinue relations with large financial entities who further push them to high debt.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Through this thesis, I have attempted to aim light into the issues of water scarcity and privatization, gender equality and women’s integral relevance and importance in water management, with particular focus in the region of Latin America. Currently, there are 1.1 billion people in developing nations lacking safe drinking water and more than 2.4 billion people lacking access to improved sanitation; consequently, water-borne illnesses is the leading cause of infant mortality in developing nations which produce an average of about 6,800 deaths per day, (Sultana and Loftus, 2012). Water has become an essential topic of discussion in the international community as water has become a source of power when privatized, as it often negates the right to the most vulnerable, in particular poor women. Although, under target 7c in the MDGs, a universal call was introduced to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, there still remains much work to be done, (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2012). It is important I mention that the over consumption by the global North compared with how water is treated and used in the global South, differs tremendously. The overconsumption by some has a ripple effect on not only the globe’s water conditions, but also the relevance and importance given by developed nations to the developing world’s water crises. It has become a matter of not being able to relate because no one is experiencing these water problems on a larger scale in developed countries. In addition, because controversial international water agreements,
such as the Dublin Principles and the Kyoto Declaration have redefined the meaning of water from a natural source needed for survival to an economic good that only those who can afford may purchase; poor urban Latin American communities and low-income rural areas have and continue to suffer the most. In fact, although the Dublin Principles acknowledges the importance of integrating women into water management solutions; it also declares water to be an economic good, thus ignoring how this principle would impact the very same demographic (women); they intended to integrate in the first place.

As part of my conclusion, I will now provide recommendations on how to develop a gender approach and integrate women successfully into sustainable water management and policy solutions; and how these commitments can be made not just through lip-service, but through actual water programs that consider women and their day-to-day lives. Secondly, I will address the possible alternatives to water privatization and emphasize the importance in developing these alternatives, in particular for developing countries in Latin America. I will end by providing an overall analysis of my thesis’ argument on gender integration in water resource management solutions, and how vital it is to bring water back to being a commons that is accessible to all, regardless of gender, class or political affiliation.

**Recommendations**

I have argued that a gender mainstream approach has become more visible in international policy statements, and that although the Dublin Principles stipulated and argued in defense of the importance of women’s roles and experiences within water
management, little change has occurred in successfully integrating a gender approach that pushes for gender equality as its main goal. In other words, much remains to be done to put into effect a global implementation which accurately and successfully integrates both men and women’s needs and experiences within the water sector. Women are by default the water managers within the household and lately, due to social shifts occurring in migration, they have also become irrigation water managers. Although women’s roles in water management have been segregated into only house work, their experiences and knowledge of how water should be managed and used are critical in developing sustainable water solutions. What follows are my recommendations of how key stakeholders, like women need to be incorporated in a gender perspective into water management for the region of Latin America. By incorporating women into the various program designs and research of water management solutions, deep issues of water scarcity and lack of access to water can be addressed, thus providing real insight and solutions that may otherwise be missed when only including men’s perspectives.

First, I must acknowledge that the much-needed participation by women cannot be simply written in an agenda or policy and be expected to implement change on its own. Governments, both local and regional must change mindsets and old tactics. Due to cultural, social and political environments where women have taken second place in various aspects of life, a profound cultural change has to permeate in order to generate a participatory approach that invites and embraces a process within which the community is empowered and allows gender stereotypes to be broken. It is critical that
the dynamic of women and men within water-related issues be analyzed through a culturally-cognizant lens. In other words, to effectively incorporate a gender approach into water management solutions, a realization of the differences in power dynamics between men and women must be addressed that take into consideration the cultural stage. It is critical to create an environment that is welcoming and encourages for both men and women’s opinions, experiences and knowledge in water management to be included in water-related issues of scarcity and sanitation and hygiene, as well as solutions. Specifically, in order to have an enabling framework that produces progress in these areas, important factors that include leadership by key stakeholders (in particular women), good coordination, local capacity, paired up with effective monitoring and the encouragement of inclusive participation by both men and women, will ensure accountability and produce sustainable results, (WHO 2012, 17-22).

In addition to promoting a cultural shift in how gender roles are perceived, it is equally important to enable political power to women by involving them in discussions that pertain to their communities. For example, in various Latin American regions experiencing water scarcity issues, it is often women who are left to gather water for the household and often times for irrigation purposes as well. However, due to a variety of factors, such as gender roles, age, social status, political involvement, ethnicity and income, women are often ignored and not acknowledged in meetings discussing water problems, even though they have first-hand experience in the local issues. Water is power and having access to how it is managed creates a dynamic of power relations within regions of Latin America that has political figures, the elite and
women as its main social actors. As I described in Chapter 4 through the examples in Mexico and Bolivia, women were at a disadvantage because they were not involved in the planning and framework of water management solutions and water scarcity problems. Instead, they were ignored and their claims went unheard; however, as water scarcity problems and price hikes threatened the livelihood of their families, they organized to protest and bring attention to their issues. If water management solutions are to be sustainable and effective in integrating gender equality and perspectives, then we must acknowledge that power dynamics within communities often negate women the access to voice their opinion, discontent or ideas, either because they are afraid of being casted as too aggressive, or are shut down by their husbands, which only perpetuates a culture that diminishes women’s opinions.

Only when we device programs that engage and encourage women to participate in discussions pertaining to their communities’ water problems, will we truly empower women to come forth and become leaders in their communities, and enable them to be proactive instead of taking passive roles. Empowering women to take action and be proactive in their communities is an essential tool for development, and one in which water management solutions would benefit tremendously. When women are considered equal and imperative local stakeholders in water-related issues; consultations with them will ensure that policies, legal frameworks, monitoring, resources are all inclusive of their experiences and that of men as well, thus creating a synergy amongst stakeholders.
Secondly, as I have recognized throughout this thesis, it is my position to promote water democracy through community-based and decentralized water conservation, which is politically and culturally inspired rather than economically motivated. In addition, I would like to clarify that the possibility of private-public partnerships could (under very regulated and monitored circumstances) assist in providing affordable and efficient water services that do not discriminate and, or, negate access to clean water to the most vulnerable in poor communities, in particular women living in already volatile areas. Addressing water as a commons and human right does have its own controversy, as declaring it a human right doesn’t mean other governments will abide and, or, treat water as such due to cultural, power and gender dynamics that may not allow or invite the environment that would permit for water to be treated as a life-giving source. However, I would also like to emphasize that water is completely dehumanized when it is marketed as a product that only the elite may enjoy. If water is treated as a basic human right that all deserve to have access to, and governments are held accountable for providing this source to its public, and pricing is metered to account and consider the most vulnerable, then water can become an accessible natural resource—a commons. Privatizing water negates local governments the ability to regulate and monitor their own natural resources, thus pushing them further into dependence of other nations, and farther from development. Thus, by collaborating and engaging the most affected and well-versed in the water scarcity problems in regions of Latin America (in particular poor women), and by including fair and regulated policy that integrates public, federal and regional government
management, water can become a sustainable natural source that is communal and accessible. Lastly, in my argument against water privatization, I must reiterate that involving environmental expertise and protecting our natural water sheds and rivers is of critical importance. Conservation of our water sources is crucial and just as important in developing sustainable water solutions. If water is not better managed by us, many developing regions of the world, in particular poor developing nations will continue to face water crises that are only perpetuated by private foreign companies, who place profit ahead of human existence and environmental conservancy.

Looking Ahead

It has been my focal point to address the positive impact that integrating women into water management solutions and other issues like sanitation and hygiene can produce for global change. Gender equality doesn’t only provide opportunities for men and women, it also closes gender gaps that hinder progress in climate change and water issues; it can also develop positive change for sustainable development in areas of education, economic growth, health and reproductive rights. A gender approach is not a one-theme ideology that only works in certain areas; on the contrary, integrating girls and women, and investing in enabling opportunities, can change the world in many facets.

Cultural dynamics in association with power struggles within Latin American politics is a challenge on its own; men and women, the elite and other political figures are the social actors which have helped describe the stories in this thesis. The battle of
water privatization versus water for life, water as a commons or human right is a continuous one. Because water produces power and the most vulnerable are often not within access of political attainment, their views, needs and rights go often ignored. The privatization of water only perpetuates gender inequality as its main focus is to make profit, not provide water for all. Alternatives to privatization can begin within the federal governments by adhering and producing results that benefit their constituent’s interests, not those of the elite. Many challenges lay ahead for Latin America, but I firmly believe that both men and women in this region will continue to demand from their governments transparency and equality. The cultural and power dynamics within the two countries showcased in Chapter 4, illustrated the importance given to the elite, the negligence of governments to their people and their inability to discontinue relations with large financial entities who further push them in high debt.

Finally, I would like to reiterate once again, that integrating a gendered perspective which values women as critical key stakeholders while also including men’s perspectives and experiences; in combination with creating an environment that is welcoming and enables women to participate, is critical. At present, women are being increasingly recognized as critical contributors and experts to the water management sector; there is a general consensus that slowly barriers are breaking down Latin American cultural traditions that viewed women as unnecessary. Further, I would also like to restate that eliminating water from a business policy plan, and instead integrating it as a commons which is treated as a human right, citizens in
developing nations can address their water problems while becoming empowered and having both political and economic authority over their livelihoods and the wellbeing of their families and future generations.
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