



## **Fact Sheet: Water in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: A Social Vision**

“Venezuela completed, ten years head of the deadline, the Millennium Goals set by the United Nations for 2015 relating to reducing by half the population without access to drinking water or sanitation.” *Vice Minister for Water of the Ministry of People’s Power for the Environment of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008.*

Water has had specific importance since Hugo Chávez was inaugurated as President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The President’s leadership brought about a new Constitution based on inclusion and a deep social emphasis; this has translated into better decision-making and the improvement of the quality of life of Venezuelans. This document highlights the most important aspects of the vision the Bolivarian government has for this vital liquid.

### ***Water as a Social Good***

The Constitution establishes the social vision for the country’s water resources, declaring water as a public good and essential for the country’s development and the eradication of poverty.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it frames the importance of water as a good for peace between peoples and as a fundamental component of ecosystems that may not be privatized since it is a non-negotiable human right.

*The investment of approximately 6 billion bolívares (around \$2.8 billion) for over 270 nation-wide projects has benefited over 7 million people.*

The Venezuelan government guarantees society’s use and enjoyment of water in a rational and responsible manner. The people should also contribute to this in solidarity, so as to guarantee the quality and quantity of water.<sup>2</sup>

**Venezuela has over one thousand rivers, 2,500 lagoons, two important lakes, and an average flow of 41,430 cubic meters per second of water in its waterways. This places Venezuela among the top 15 countries with fresh water reserves on the planet.** This water abundance gives the country, among other things, a high

potential for hydroelectricity, particularly in the southern parts of the country, where the Caroní River alone has the potential to produce 26,000 megawatts of power, equivalent to 800,000 barrels of oil a day.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Comprehensive Focus on Management***

Water management in the country is comprehensively undertaken using tools and practices that guarantee its sustainable use. Venezuela’s zoning policies are a basic instrument for planning and managing water use. One strategy implemented in the country has been the creation of National Parks to protect water basins that provide this resource to cities and populated areas. These criteria of conservation and zoning have led to “95% of the water consumed in the country coming from 18 of 43 national parks” that exist throughout Venezuela.<sup>4</sup> This focus is internationally recognized: Venezuela is seen as an example of water management and conservation.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Settling the Socio-Ecological Debt***

<sup>3</sup> *Recursos Hídricos de Venezuela*, Ministry of People’s Power for the Environment (Minamb), First Edition, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> César Aponte, Minamb Director of Protect Areas in a personal communication regarding the following case study: “Water and Protected Areas Case Studies: Guatopo and Macario nacional Parks”, Marzo 2009.

<sup>5</sup> “Water and Protected Areas Case Studies: Guatopo and Macario National Parks”, International Union for Conservation of Nature, March 2009.

[http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/guatopo\\_and\\_macarao\\_national\\_parks.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/guatopo_and_macarao_national_parks.pdf) (Accessed March 10, 2009)

<sup>1</sup> 1999 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Article 304.

<sup>2</sup> 2007 Water Law.



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Despite the fact that Venezuela’s hydrographic network is dense, there are zones where water resources are scarce, such as the northern coast of the country, where a majority of the population is concentrated in cities. Satisfying their water and sanitation demands has been difficult.

As such, from the beginning the Bolivarian government decided to guarantee drinking water and sanitation for the population. Important projects began in the year 2000, with an investment of nearly \$2.8 billion for 270 nation-wide projects related to the capture, distribution, cleansing and treatment of water.<sup>6</sup> Over 7 million people have gained access to drinking water and sanitation as a result of these projects.<sup>7</sup>

**Principles of Co-responsibility and Social Inclusion**

Under the principle of participation established in the Constitution, affairs related to improving access to drinking water and sanitation are managed through Water Community Boards, which are an expression of the people’s power in achieving social justice.<sup>8</sup> Today, there are over 3,000 Water Community Boards throughout the country that have implemented over 700 projects.<sup>9</sup> These projects have benefited over 400,000 people from traditionally excluded communities.<sup>10,11</sup>



Water Community Boards: an expression of People’s Power

**Meeting Millennium Development Goals**

Thanks to government-community cooperation and efforts, Venezuela met a Millennium Development Goal ten years ahead of time. (Target 7c: Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.<sup>12</sup>). “The meeting of millennium goals implies that over 7 million people have been incorporated into the sanitation services and over 6 million to drinking water networks, with coverage of 95% in urban areas and 79% in rural areas. The goal is to reach 100% coverage by 2010. Regarding the collection of used water, coverage rose from 62% in 1999 to 82% in 2008. . . [and] treatment rose from 9% in 1999 to 27% currently.”<sup>13</sup> These achievements have been made thanks to the government’s interest in water issues.

**Water as a Tool for Integration**

Under the framework of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), and as part of the strategic vision for regional growth, the integration of Latin America is taking place through water. With the slogan “Water unites us”, conventions on cooperation and on the supply and exchange of technical assistance, equipment and personnel have been signed with Nicaragua and Cuba; these are examples of how the principles of solidarity and cooperation can improve the quality of life of the people.<sup>14</sup>

March 20, 2009

<sup>6</sup> “El Sector APS como actor protagónico en la construcción del Poder Popular y la nueva cultura hídrica”, Minamb Hidroven, August 2007. [http://www.hidroven.gov.ve/ls\\_plan\\_presi.php](http://www.hidroven.gov.ve/ls_plan_presi.php) (Accessed March 1st, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> “En los últimos 8 años se logró darle servicio de agua potable a 7 millones de venezolanos,” Minamb, [http://www.minamb.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=343&Itemid=99](http://www.minamb.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=343&Itemid=99) (Accessed March 1st, 2009)

<sup>8</sup> Community Management FAQ, Minamb Hidrocapital, [http://www.hidrocapital.com.ve/index.asp?spg\\_id=9](http://www.hidrocapital.com.ve/index.asp?spg_id=9) (Accessed March 20, 2009)

<sup>9</sup> Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Ambiente, Hidroven “El Sector APS como actor protagónico en la construcción del Poder Popular y la nueva cultura hídrica.” (Accessed March 1st, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> “Venezuela celebra el Día Mundial del Agua,” Ministry of People’s Power for Communication and Information, March 22, 2007. (Accessed March 22, 2009)

[http://www.minci.gob.ve/reportajes/2/12876/venezuela\\_celebra\\_eldia.html](http://www.minci.gob.ve/reportajes/2/12876/venezuela_celebra_eldia.html)

<sup>11</sup> See the fact sheet on Water Management in Venezuela at <http://www.embavenez-us.org/?pagina=http://www.embavenez-us.org/factsheet/main.php&titulo=Fact%20Sheets>

<sup>12</sup> Millennium Development Goals, United Nations Development Programme, <http://www.undp.org/mdg/goal7.shtml> (Accessed March 20, 2009)

<sup>13</sup> “En los últimos 8 años se logró darle servicio de agua potable a 7 millones de venezolanos.”

<sup>14</sup> “El Sector APS como actor protagónico en la construcción del Poder Popular y la nueva cultura hídrica.”



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