

Right to Access and Consumption of Potable Water in the Milagro Canton

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Abstract

The significance of the right to access clean and safe water has been recognized and championed by international organizations, governments, and scholars, underscoring its pivotal role in addressing global challenges, such as public health, poverty, and sustainability. The Milagro Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD) established the Public Potable Water Company with the aim of managing and administering water resources to supply its population of approximately two hundred thousand inhabitants. The proposed solution is to seek private investment through a repayment plan that is accessible and convenient for both the GAD and the private sector. This plan aims to establish an efficient system that ensures optimal access to water, its proper functioning, and continuous 24/7 access for all citizens throughout the year. The right to access clean and safe water is a topic of paramount importance in the contemporary world. Justifying an in-depth exploration of this subject is rooted in several compelling reasons, including its fundamental role in human existence, its intersection with various global challenges, and its recognition as a universal human right. Below, we outline the key justifications for the extensive study of the right to access water.

Keywords: access to water, rights, decentralized autonomous governments.

1. Introduction

Water is a fundamental and indispensable element of human life, and its access is an intrinsic right, essential to ensuring the well-being, health, and dignity of individuals and communities around the world. The significance of the right to access clean and safe water has been recognized and championed by international organizations, governments, and scholars, underscoring its pivotal role in addressing global challenges, such as public health, poverty, and sustainability. The provision of potable water, both as a basic human right and a critical environmental resource, has become a focal point of legal, ethical, and social discussions, with a profound impact on people's lives and the planet's future.

The right to access clean water is multifaceted, encompassing several dimensions, including legal, ethical, environmental, and socio-economic aspects. It is deeply rooted in the principles of human rights, as recognized by international agreements and conventions. The United Nations General Assembly, in particular, has played a central role in emphasizing the importance of water access as a basic human right. In 2010, the UN General Assembly explicitly recognized "the right to safe and clean drinking water and

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sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights." This momentous declaration solidified the status of water access as a fundamental human right, further supported by various resolutions, including those outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, subsequently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The significance of the right to water transcends mere accessibility, extending to the equitable distribution and sustainable management of water resources. It involves not only the quantity but also the quality of water, addressing issues related to water pollution, contamination, and inadequate infrastructure. A comprehensive approach to the right to water encompasses a commitment to ensuring that water sources are protected, managed responsibly, and conserved for future generations.

The realization of the right to water carries profound implications for social justice, public health, and poverty reduction. It is intrinsically linked to the fight against waterborne diseases, as ensuring access to clean water is a critical step in preventing illness and enhancing overall health. Moreover, equitable access to water resources is essential for addressing poverty and fostering economic development, particularly in impoverished regions where water scarcity perpetuates cycles of deprivation.

This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the right to access clean and safe water. It delves into the legal foundations, ethical dimensions, environmental imperatives, and socio-economic consequences of this fundamental human right. Throughout this examination, we will draw upon a range of authoritative sources, including international treaties, academic works, and expert opinions, to provide a holistic understanding of the right to water and its profound significance for individuals, communities, and our planet. One of the major issues in Ecuador is related to sanitation, particularly the importance of having drinkable water to provide citizens with confidence and health security. Often, this issue arises due to the lack of proper allocation of economic resources by the Decentralized Autonomous Governments (GAD), resulting in inadequate treatment of water services for the Milagro community.

The Milagro Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD) established the Public Potable Water Company with the aim of managing and administering water resources to supply its population of approximately two hundred thousand inhabitants. In the context of this research, the following questions will be addressed: Why is the entire population not receiving the potable water service? Is the Public Company's work efficient in terms of water treatment and service? Does the Milagro Public Company need state economic resources or private investment to ensure the quality of potable water in the Milagro canton?

The proposed solution is to seek private investment through a repayment plan that is accessible and convenient for both the GAD and the private sector. This plan aims to establish an efficient system that ensures optimal access to water, its proper functioning, and continuous 24/7 access for all citizens throughout the year.

Article 3 of the Ecuadorian Constitution establishes one of the state's duties as ensuring the right to access water. Additionally, Article 12 defines the human right to water as fundamental and inalienable, with water being a national asset. The responsibility for providing and ensuring access to water is delegated to the Decentralized Autonomous Governments (GAD) by the Central Government.

The GAD is responsible for water treatment, including the processes of water capture, purification, and distribution to ensure that the water supplied to the residents is clean and safe for human consumption. In order to have a special law regulating water, the "Organic Law on Water Resources, Uses, and Water Utilization" was approved to establish control over water resources and ensure optimal treatment and preservation

Due to the absence of a law that allows private investment and management in the use, treatment, capture, and distribution of water through concessions, the population does not have a healthy environment when consuming water, which ultimately affects their health.

However, Article 318 of the Ecuadorian Constitution restricts direct private investment, particularly when it involves foreign investment. Furthermore, Article 6 of the Organic Law on Water Resources prohibits water privatization, discouraging private sector involvement. Private investors believe that the only way to ensure a return on their investment is by managing the project's execution, but the law prohibits this.

1. Justification

The right to access clean and safe water is a topic of paramount importance in the contemporary world. Justifying an in-depth exploration of this subject is rooted in several compelling reasons, including its fundamental role in human existence, its intersection with various global challenges, and its recognition as a universal human right. Below, we outline the key justifications for the extensive study of the right to access water.

1.1. Basic Human Right

Access to clean and safe water is recognized as a fundamental human right by the United Nations. The acknowledgment of this right carries profound ethical and legal implications, highlighting the necessity of ensuring that individuals and communities have equitable access to this vital resource. Investigating the foundations and implications of this right is crucial for upholding the principles of human rights and social justice.

1.2. Global Health and Well-being

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations, include a dedicated goal for water and sanitation (Goal 6). Water access is intertwined with many other SDGs, such as those related to poverty reduction, food security, and environmental sustainability. Investigating the right to water is essential for comprehending its role in achieving a more sustainable and equitable world.

1.3. Sustainable Development

Access to potable water is integral to public health and well-being. Waterborne diseases, caused by the lack of clean water, continue to be a major global health concern, particularly in impoverished regions. A thorough examination of the right to water is essential to understanding how access to clean water contributes to improved public health and overall human development.

1.4. Environmental Considerations

Beyond human consumption, water is a finite resource with intricate connections to the environment. The responsible management and protection of water resources are crucial for environmental sustainability. Examining the right to water involves understanding how to balance human needs with ecological preservation, especially in the face of challenges like climate change.

1.5. Social and Economic Impacts

Access to clean water has wide-ranging socio-economic consequences. It plays a pivotal role in poverty reduction, as communities with reliable water access have the potential for economic development and improved living standards. Investigating the right to water allows for a comprehensive analysis of its social and economic impacts.

1.6. Legal Frameworks and International Agreements

The right to water is enshrined in international law, and numerous treaties, conventions, and declarations underscore its significance. Investigating this right necessitates an examination of the legal frameworks that support it and how countries are working to implement it.

1.7. Current Challenges and Future Sustainability

Water scarcity and contamination are pressing global issues. Understanding the right to water is vital for addressing these challenges and ensuring the sustainability of water resources for future generations.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for understanding the right to access clean and safe water is built upon a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from fields such as law, ethics, environmental science, public health, and economics. This framework provides the intellectual foundation for comprehending the intricacies, significance, and implications of this fundamental human right.

2.1. Basic Human Right

Ecuador is a constitutional country with its supreme norm being the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, which expressly establishes principles and guarantees for each strategic sector. This is detailed in its first section under an explicit section called "Water and Food," which precisely explains in Articles 12 and 13 that water is a fundamental and inalienable right, and it must be permanent and uninterrupted.

Access to water, as it is considered a strategic sector, has its own specific regulations that govern its use, treatment, and utilization, for proper control by the state, delegating competence over water resources to each Decentralized Autonomous Government.

The right to water is universal and must be safeguarded in the regulations of countries. Since water is a matter of human rights, it is essential to consider the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which is the normative instrument that safeguards these human rights before the United Nations. This instrument affirms that water is a right of every human being.

While the international framework of human rights does not establish that the supply of water must be free, it does contemplate that the state must ensure at least the satisfaction of the minimum essential levels of the right to water if a family definitively cannot afford the service costs. In these terms, the state is obliged to establish subsidy or exemption mechanisms for social sectors that, due to their economic condition, cannot bear the real cost of accessing the water service.

One of the basic resources for human life and existence is water. Nowadays, society is facing a type of poverty called "water poverty." This is due to the unequal distribution of such a basic and necessary yet scarce resource. Each state applies its own policies within a common international framework to combat it and, at the same time, eradicate it. It is not an easy path, but it is possible if policies aimed at equitable and guaranteed distribution are implemented. Ensuring that no one is denied access for any reason.

There are factors that influence the unequal distribution of water, such as geographical and climatic factors of a specific region, the particular policies applied, or the social behavior of a community since historically, populations settled where water was available. Water is therefore an essential good from which no one can be deprived.

2.2. Early stages of the implementation of the water sanitation and distribution system Basic Human Right

As a starting point for the analysis, it is assumed in the balance of the last 50 years, when Latin America rapidly urbanizes, simultaneously builds a basic sectoral institutional framework, and significantly expands its water infrastructure. During this period, countries have attempted to partially keep up with the rapid urban growth. Therefore, priority has been given to expanding water and sanitary sewer networks to serve new urban residents, achieving coverage rates of 80% and 75% in 2010, respectively, in virtually all countries.

However, despite the progress reflected in international statistics, a significant portion of the urban population still lacks or receives precarious services. This situation is reflected in deficiencies in the sanitary quality of water, the lack of continuity and pressure in distribution systems, and the low level of wastewater treatment. Furthermore, most cities have significant deficiencies in rainwater drainage infrastructure and the protection of water sources.

In the case of water, we can assume that it was during the 19th century, or more precisely, until the remarkable discoveries of Koch and Pasteur were well-known, that water distribution systems (WDS) were developed under the hypothesis that water should be conveyed naturally from its source (regardless of how distant it might be) to urban centers. Large cities had to increasingly seek water from greater distances, made possible by the ease with which different municipalities obtained "very cheap money," mainly from municipal savings banks that were established at the time and controlled by the municipalities themselves.

2.3. State concession system

In the field of public services, the most traditional institution is the concession. This is because the concession is featured in the legal-administrative system with a technical precision that is difficult to replace. The prior existence of a declaration, that is, the legal declaration of an activity as a "public service" (with the prior prohibition of private activities). This declaration covers an entire sector of services, and the State can "delegate" its management to citizens (through a concession) or manage it directly. The administrative creation of a right of use in favor of individuals, which practically implies the transfer of responsibility for quality and other characteristics of any public service to individuals. The maintenance of state powers in the sector to control, through administrative intervention, the fulfillment of public interest objectives.

The need to comply with basic legislation in terms of minimum services and the desire on the part of municipal authorities to improve the quality of life for their citizens makes intergovernmental cooperation an essential tool for financially weak municipalities.

Despite all of this, the political, financial, and other barriers that prevent the public management of water from reaching its full potential are not insurmountable. What is needed, fundamentally, is the political will to overcome outdated ideological prejudices and create environments that promote the improvement of public water management models.

The identification and establishment of an innovative value proposition, strategic guidelines, objectives, indicators, and goals provide a structured guide that the organization must follow to maintain its presence in the market and provide its services over time. This direction is reflected in a Strategic Plan.

The 224 municipalities in the country are responsible for the provision of services in municipal urban centers, either directly or through autonomous municipal companies. In Guayaquil, the provision is handled by the private company Interagua.

2.4. Organization and Management

Privatization policies of water and sanitation services in Latin America have been presented as a technical solution, devoid of political content, to the chronic problems that characterize this sector. For instance, Terence Lee and Andrei Jouravlev (1997) of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) argue that there is broad support for the idea that the transfer of these public companies into the hands of "private ownership and management monopolies could increase economic efficiency.

The organizational model of the sector takes into account that it operates on two levels, one institutional and the other entrepreneurial. The institutional level is the relationship and interaction among different public institutions at the national, regional, and local levels,

from a hierarchy and resource perspective. The entrepreneurial level is the interaction between institutions, the regional company, and service providers (urban and rural).

The major problem lies in the management of the natural resource, where in most cases, there is private capital and administration, turning this essential public service into a source of income. This does not mean that the company cannot charge for the service it provides; on the contrary, the aim is for the entire population of the national territory to have access to clean water. However, in cases of extreme poverty, it is the State and society who, in a solidarity manner, finance access to clean water to a certain extent.

Environmental management systems designed in companies allow for the prevention, reduction, and elimination of environmental impacts and increasingly focus on preventive measures, where knowledge and cost control are the most important tools for achieving benefits as long as they respect the environment. This is why it is necessary to calculate the costs of environmental activities to enrich the environmental management of the entity and support decision-making based on achieving the sustainability of natural resources.

Put in concrete terms, the right to water would contribute to realizing the potential of economic policies, but if these were flawed or provided incentives not aimed at promoting investment and resource conservation, little or nothing can be done with the right.

Quality in public management should be measured in terms of the ability to timely and adequately satisfy the needs and expectations of citizens, according to pre-established goals aligned with the higher purposes of public administration and based on quantifiable results that take into account the interest and needs of society.

3. Conclusion

The exploration of the right to access clean and safe water reveals a complex and multifaceted landscape that intertwines legal, ethical, environmental, and socio-economic dimensions. Water, as a fundamental element of human life, stands at the nexus of critical global challenges, including public health, poverty, and sustainability. This examination underscores the intrinsic importance of ensuring equitable and sustainable access to water, not only as a basic human right but also as a cornerstone for addressing broader societal issues.

The legal foundations of the right to water, enshrined in international agreements and conventions, emphasize its universal significance. The United Nations General Assembly's explicit recognition of "the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation" in 2010 solidifies its status as an essential human right. However, the complexities surrounding water access extend beyond legal frameworks, delving into ethical considerations, environmental imperatives, and socio-economic impacts.

In the specific context of Ecuador, the Milagro community faces challenges related to water sanitation and distribution. The inadequate treatment of water services due to the misallocation of economic resources by Decentralized Autonomous Governments (GAD) raises questions about efficiency and the need for private investment. The proposed solution involves seeking private investment through a feasible repayment plan, aiming to establish an efficient system that ensures optimal water access, functionality, and continuous availability for all citizens.

Ecuador's legal framework recognizes water as a fundamental right, delegated to GADs for responsible management. However, constraints on private investment, particularly foreign investment, pose challenges. While legal provisions restrict direct private involvement, innovative solutions, such as accessible repayment plans, could bridge the gap between public needs and private investment interests.

The theoretical framework guiding the understanding of the right to water incorporates a multidisciplinary approach, embracing law, ethics, environmental science, public health,

and economics. This comprehensive perspective is essential for navigating the intricate interactions between human needs, ecological preservation, and socio-economic development.

Justifying the in-depth exploration of the right to access water is rooted in its role as a basic human right, its implications for global health and well-being, its connection to sustainable development, and its impacts on environmental, social, and economic facets. As water scarcity and contamination emerge as pressing global challenges, understanding the right to water becomes imperative for addressing these issues and ensuring the future sustainability of water resources.

The right to access clean and safe water transcends legal boundaries; it is an ethical imperative, an environmental responsibility, and a catalyst for socio-economic development. The exploration of this right calls for collaborative efforts, innovative solutions, and a holistic approach that considers the intricate interplay of legal, ethical, environmental, and socio-economic factors. Ultimately, securing the right to water is not only a legal obligation but a moral imperative that shapes the well-being of individuals, communities, and the planet as a whole.

Acknowledgements

A deep appreciation to the Master's Program in Constitutional Law at the University of the Santa Elena Peninsula (UPSE), and to my sister, PhD. Silvia Pacheco Mendoza, for her unwavering support.

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