



Popular participation in the city

20 years of decentralisation in Cochabamba's barrios

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Red Acción Comunitaria is an NGO that supports low-income and informal urban communities in upgrading projects in Bolivia. Its mission is to work with community members to build fairer and more just cities, and to encourage the participation of the urban poor in decisions that affect the lives of their families, neighbourhoods and the city. It is affiliated with the global network Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI).

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Popular participation was introduced in Bolivia in 1994 as part of comprehensive decentralising reforms. At the time the state, international development donors and commentators suggested that popular participation and decentralisation could help alleviate poverty and inequality, democratise governance and planning processes, and even empower citizens. Over two decades later, the impacts are disputed. There has been extensive analysis of the often-positive implications for low-income rural communities – alongside criticism of the weak institutions and corruption that can undermine the process. There has been less reflection on the impact that this process has had on the development of low-income and informal urban communities. This paper outlines how popular participation has been deployed unequally across low-income, peri-urban settlements in the southern zone of Cochabamba. It considers how low-income communities have developed parallel informal participatory institutions at the community level to identify and meet their development needs.

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Acronyms

ASICASUDD-EPSAS	Association of Community Water Systems of the South and Water and Sanitation Providers (Asociación de Sistemas Comunitarios del Agua del Sud Departamental y Entidades Prestadoras de Servicio de Agua y Saneamiento)
CEPLAG	Centre for Planning and Management (Centro de Planificación y Gestión, Universidad Mayor de San Simón)
CONALJUVE	National Confederation of Neighbourhood Councils (Confederación Nacional de Juntas Vecinales)
EMSA	Municipal Sanitation Services Company of Cochabamba (Empresa Municipal de Servicios de Aseo de Cochabamba)
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LPP	Popular Participation Law (Ley de Participación Popular)
MAS	Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OTBs	Grassroots organisations (organizaciones territoriales de base)
POA	Annual public works plan (programa de operaciones annual)
RAC	Red Acción Comunitaria
SEMAPA	Municipal Water and Sanitation Service (Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado)

Summary

On the 29 March 2015, sub-national elections were held in Bolivia that resulted in major losses for the ruling government party the Movement for Socialism (MAS). Commentators suggest that acts of corruption, authoritarianism and lack of confidence in the electoral body as some of the reasons that influenced this dramatic shift. In the city of Cochabamba, the MAS lost to a little-known conservative candidate by 20 per cent, reflecting concerns that local political leaders and local government institutions were not responding to citizen demands and needs. Drawing on interviews and surveys undertaken with community leaders and members in 2014, and extended ethnographic fieldwork undertaken with community water providers in the region between 2009 and 2014, this working paper considers some of the processes that have influenced this change in local politics by exploring how decentralisation and popular participation has evolved and been deployed in low-income, peri-urban settlements in Cochabamba. It outlines how low-income communities have developed parallel informal participatory institutions at the community level in order to identify and meet their development needs.

The Popular Participation Law (LPP) was introduced in Bolivia in 1994 as part of a series of comprehensive decentralising political reforms. Three hundred and fourteen municipalities were created and 20 per cent of state expenditure was made available to provide per capita resources and decision-making powers to legally recognised grassroots organisations (OTBs). At the time, the state, international development donors and commentators suggested that popular participation and decentralisation could help alleviate poverty and inequality and democratise governance and planning processes (Altman and Lalander 2003), and even empower citizens. Over two decades later, the impacts have been contested. There has been extensive analysis of the often positive implications for low-income rural communities in the subsequent decades (Faguet

2004; Faguet and Sanchez 2008) but criticism of the weak institutions and corruption that can undermine the process (Kohl 2003, McNeish 2006). There has been less reflection on the impact that this process has had on the development of low-income and informal urban communities.

Popular participation policies were designed and implemented with deprived rural communities in mind; the reforms emerged from pro-poor rural development reforms which were a popular part of neo-liberal development interventions of the time (Altman and Lalander 2003). However, limited mechanisms were put in place to hone and develop these decentralising reforms around the specific needs of low-income and informal urban communities (Cielo *et al.* 2008). Drawing on ethnographic research and interviews¹ with community leaders, district representatives and community members from District 8 (one of the poorest regions in the peri-urban southern zone in Cochabamba) this working paper considers what LPP reforms have brought to low-income and informal urban communities. It argues that the decentralised governance structures in place have served to re-enforce their exclusion on three fronts:

The LPP processes that have emerged in low-income urban areas have led to the development of weak community-level institutions that do not allocate resources according to local needs. LPP institutions do not facilitate the participation of low-income households and community leaders often fail to develop work-upgrading programmes that reflect the needs of residents. Instead, decisions around resource allocation and projects are often influenced by informal alliances between community leaders, political co-optation by national parties, conflict and even violence.

¹ This paper draws on the experiences of women's savings groups in District 8 and the NGO that supports their work and works in the barrio since 2010. It also draws on specific research undertaken over a three month period from June – September 2014, the community, council, and local authority level, including 100 surveys with community members in formal and informal settlements, interviews with 33 community leaders, 17 members of the local authority and 6 in-depth interviews with ex- district and council leaders.

The active exclusion of informal communities from the benefits of popular participation and decentralisation serves to promote and sustain informal community institutions and service providers. There are policies and laws that make it difficult for informal communities to become an OTB that can access decentralised LPP funds. In Cochabamba, disputes over land titling, local government concerns about the extension of the city limits, and lengthy bureaucratic formalisation processes mean that almost 50 per cent of communities in District 8 in southern Cochabamba are illegal and without the capacity to access decentralised resources and support. Communities thus rely on informal neighbourhood councils known as *juntas vecinales* and informal water committees that emulate their formal counterparts. This contributes to the juridical plurality and complexity that undermines integrated planning at the district level.

Informal communities in Cochabamba rely on civil society organisations to improve basic services. However, popular participation does not provide adequate space for grassroots organisations beyond the OTB to participate in local planning processes. Civil society organisations have to engage with local government on an ad-hoc basis. They draw on a range of delicately negotiated partnerships with communities and local government to drive local development and fill basic service gaps. In practice, there is a spectrum of state-citizen partnerships, ranging from tolerance by the state to more strategic partnerships. These have the potential to deepen participatory processes in low-income areas, and build more integrated development plans at the district level. However, there are increasingly limited opportunities for this as a result of emerging national processes.

1

Defining decentralisation in Bolivia

Decentralisation is a broad term that is often used to describe how power is diffused or redistributed through a host of social, economic and political processes across countries and institutions. In Latin America, decentralisation can be understood as part of a political process that transferred political agency and resources from central government to local authorities in an attempt to democratise national political arenas, many of which had been dominated by centralised autocratic regimes.

Over two decades after the introduction of decentralising reforms in Bolivia, the political landscape has changed dramatically. On the one hand, the process of administrative decentralisation has embedded the discourse of popular participation, through a web of interconnected institutions from the national government down to grassroots indigenous and neighbourhood councils known as *juntas vecinales*. On the other, the impressive uprising of indigenous social movements and unions during the 2000s suggests that popular participation and top-down processes of democratising the state were not sufficient for most Bolivians. Indeed, these insurrections led to an overhaul of the system and the election of the country's first indigenous leader, Evo Morales, who led the development of a new constitution based around a spectrum of indigenous and human rights. Domestically, despite concerns from social movements that Morales has been unable to deliver the radical political overhaul that was promised (Gutiérrez 2008), he has delivered impressive social and economic

results (Schipani 2014, 2015). Now in his third term, the president has narrowed the spaces for unruly social movements and organisations that he knows could destabilise the government (Webber 2011). Morales has also engaged in a process of recentralising state control by developing new ministries, such as the Ministry for Environment and Water, which has been working to consolidate the fragmented water sector consisting of over 120,000 formal and informal water providers – a sector which had been largely decentralised until 2008 (see Walnycki 2013, Crespo 2010). Decentralisation and popular participation now sits alongside on-going endeavours to recentralise and consolidate state control over unruly sectors and parts of society.

1.1 The drivers of decentralisation in Bolivia

Neoliberal reforms during the 1990s focused on decentralising state control and streamlining the state. In Bolivia in 1994, the Popular Participation Law (LPP) sought to diffuse the influence of the state through pre-existing, informal, communitarian or social structures including indigenous councils in rural areas (*ayllus*) and neighbourhood councils in urban areas (*juntas vecinales*). In practice, this meant that communities could legalise their neighbourhood to form a legally recognised grassroots organisation (OTB). In doing so, a community can access per capita funds for local

development initiatives and participate in decentralised decision-making structures at the level of the local council, district and municipality.

In practice, these administrative reforms have been assessed to be part of an approach that intended to build local groups to reduce 'the pressure on the state and break up the burgeoning social and union organisations, such as the Bolivian Trade Union Confederation' (Arbona 2008: 28). Reforms were built on ideas of multiculturalism and were in keeping with broader neoliberal policies adopted across Latin America during this period (McNeish 2006). Or as outlined by Boelens 'State downsizing, decentralisation is seized upon by central governments to lighten their responsibilities and strengthen their legitimacy and control at the local level [...] the previous Bolivian government explicitly stated that the core purpose of decentralisation was to re-establish state authority over society' (Boelens 2008: 321).

Some have commented that this is an example of divide and rule (van Cott 2000). The state sought to use pre-existing community structures to do this, beginning with indigenous and mining communities with long histories of collective organising, although there were less obvious community organisations to target in the unruly peri-urban regions of Cochabamba (Goldstein 2004). As this paper will demonstrate, the LPP processes failed to take into consideration the informal urban communities and their unfamiliar social structures and institutions on the fringes of the city, such as are found in District 8 of the southern zone of Cochabamba.

2

Research objectives and methodology

Red de Acción Comunitaria (Community Action Network) is an NGO that support the Tejiendo Ciudades (Weaving Cities) savings groups in low income and informal communities in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and Oruro in Bolivia, and are affiliated with the international network Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI). The following research objectives were developed to explore how informal communities organise and seek to participate in formal decentralised planning processes in the largely low-income Southern Zone of Cochabamba.

1. Identify and define the formal and informal barrios in District 8, their legal status, and capacity to access decentralised resources
2. Consider how formal and informal communities in District 8 organise around development needs; the role of residents and community leaders.
3. Consider how formal and informal neighbourhood organizations participate in development processes at the District Council and to what extent they can influence District Development Plans.
4. Consider the impact of certain public policies; local and national, in the improvement of living conditions and in response to the demands of informal communities in District 8

The research was undertaken between June and December 2014, but focussed on the 2009 – 2014 electoral period. As part of this research Red de Accion Comunitaria and Tejiendo Ciudades consolidated profiles of 72 formal and informal settlements across District Eight. 100 surveys were undertaken with members of informal and formal communities across the Zona Sur regarding their participation in local development processes. Interviews were undertaken with 33 formal and informal community leaders; and 17 local government officials. Six in-depth interviews were undertaken with ex-leaders from the local and district council. This research also reflect on PhD research with Water Committees in the region (see Walnycki 2015).

3

An overview of District 8

The municipality of Cochabamba has grown around a well-situated market town that serves many of the agricultural producers from across the department and even neighbouring departments. Over half a million people live in its 14 districts. Six of these – districts 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 14 – are more disadvantaged than the others and are located in the south of the municipality, known locally as the southern zone. The region has largely urbanised without formal infrastructure

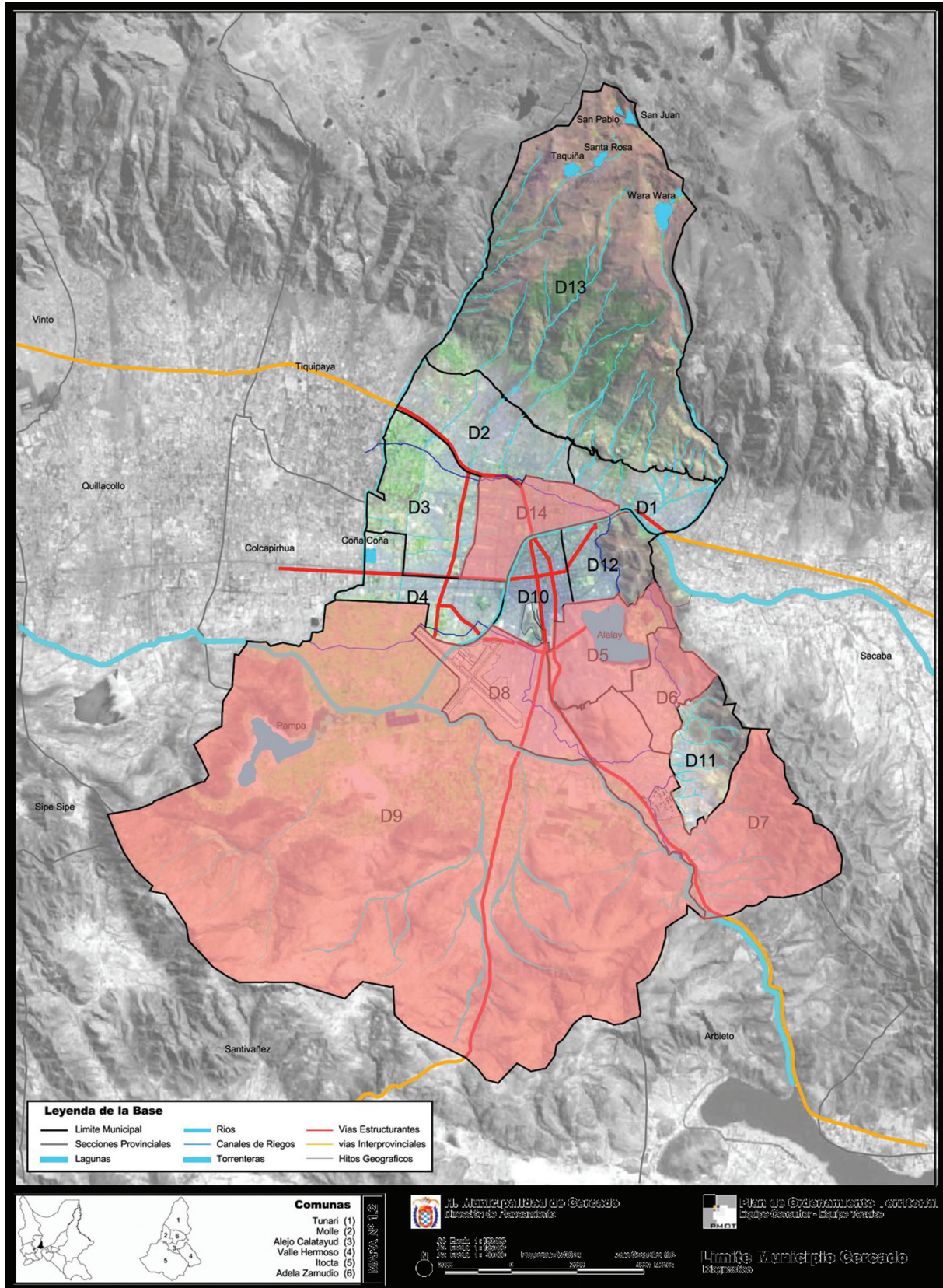
The process of urbanisation in Cochabamba was driven by a range of processes in the second half of the 20th century. The region grew rapidly following the opening of the road from Cochabamba to Santa Cruz and the consolidation of La Cancha market in 1950. Meanwhile, the 1952 revolution and subsequent 1954 Urban Reform Act led to the disbanding of the hacienda system and the redistribution of land, whereby large parts were transformed for urban use. The scattered rural settlements of El Salvador, Valle Hermoso and Uspha Uspha developed into urban settlements in 1944, 1951 and 1952 respectively, and by the 1970s, the city gradually spread into the northern Valle Hermoso area of what is the southern zone today. Then in 1985 migrants began arriving from the mines of the Altiplano following a global drop in the price of tin which triggered the closure of hundreds of public mines and the subsequent demise of the sector. More recently, climatic changes such as droughts that have affected extensive rural areas to the south of the city have led to permanent and seasonal migration to the city and particularly the southern zone. Butrón and Veizaga (2003) make a comparison of migration rates before and after the National Population and Housing Census (CNPV) of

2001. These figures indicate that migration rates peaked precisely at the time when the miners were relocating. This 'wave of migrants tended to come from urban areas, as three out of four migrants came from other towns and cities, while only a quarter came from rural areas' (Durán 2007).

It is clear that most of the poorest migrants live in the southern zone, and that a large proportion of these are female. About 65 per cent of women in the city's southern periphery live on less than two dollars a day, and half live in extreme poverty. Meanwhile, 80 per cent of female-headed households in the south-central part of the southern zone live below the national poverty line. Research undertaken by the Centre for Planning and Management in Bolivia (Ledo 2009: 69) found that among direct migrants in the city of Cochabamba, more than 50 per cent of the men and two thirds of the women who are heads of households live on less than two dollars a day (ibid).

While some migrants have been able to access affordable land and develop community-level services, migration has also led to the emergence of deprived neighbourhoods and households with very poor-quality housing and without secure tenure. A study by CEPLAG states that 'in the low-income areas of the city there has been a proliferation of single-storey dwellings in rows, as a "grassroots urbanisation" process which has created a second Cochabamba, whose neighbourhoods have managed to become part of the city under terms that conflict with urban regulations, in the midst of a chronic lack of the most elemental services, teetering up the steepest of slopes' (CEPLAG

Figure 1. Map of Cochabamba districts (southern zone highlighted in pink)



Source: Department of Planning, Municipal Government of Cochabamba, 2011.

2009: 27). This inequality clearly manifests itself between the centre and the southern zone, but also between and within communities in the southern zone. In recent years the influx of remittances means that two-storey 'Eurocasas' (homes built with remittances from Europe) stand alongside windowless, one-room adobe structures which are often excluded from or unable to afford adequate access to basic services.

3.1 Access to basic services

Mirroring the trend observed in many developing countries during the 20th century Cochabamba experienced an infrastructural crisis reflecting broader economic and political processes (Laurie and Marvin 1999). The municipality became more densely populated and simultaneously continued to expand, but did not develop sufficient infrastructure to meet the water and sanitation needs of the city, particularly the poorer migrant communities in the peri-urban southern zone. The public water utility, Municipal Water and Sanitation Service (SEMAPA), like the sector at large, was underfunded until the 1990s, with less than 1 per cent of public investment in the sector prior to privatisation (Oporto and Salinas 2007) and infrastructure was prioritised for the urban centre. This meant that most of the southern zone, including District 8, has been left unserved by the public utility; around 50 per cent relies on informal communal provision and 50 per cent on water vendors. It is estimated that there are 500–600 small-scale formal and informal potable water providers in the municipality of Cochabamba (World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme 2007) and 149

formal community water providers in the southern zone (ibid: 18). A 2011 study demonstrates the range in water prices across the southern zone (see Walnycki 2013).

SEMAPA has been undermined by poor management, corruption and an ageing infrastructural system that loses water to clandestine connections and leaky pipes (Shultz and Draper 2009: 35). In the hills to the north of the city, the 'silver bullet' solution to water provision in Cochabamba has been on the horizon for five decades. The Misicuni Dam was originally designed during the 1960s, but the latest incarnation of the project has been hindered by mismanagement and corruption (Crespo Flores 2014). The residents of the southern zone have been promised priority access to Misicuni water (Caero 2009). However, the proposed trunk that would bring a mainline waterpipe to the southern zone would only connect the communities that already have water committees. These are local community-managed water networks that deliver water to each household in the community (see Walnycki 2015). There is a stark difference between the committees that deliver water to each household and the poorer 50 per cent of the southern zone who rely on mobile water vendors to fill water barrels kept in people's yards.

There is no sewer system in the southern zone, and so communities rely on septic tanks, open defecation, and in some instances, ecosan toilets.² There is an ongoing programme whereby the state is installing sewerage pipes in some settlements, but there is no water connection yet, and so the pipelines sit empty.

Communities tend to successfully organise at the level of the bloc to bring in electricity, working together to pay

Table 1. Water prices in the southern zone, July 2011

SEMAPA (public water provider to the city centre)	£0.36 per cubic metre
DWC Agua Sur	£0.50 per cubic metre
DWC APAAS Villa Pagador	£0.40 per cubic metre
DWC Valle Hermoso	£0.20 per cubic metre
DWC Villa Venezuela	£0.24 per cubic metre
Aguateros	£0.50–1.40 per turil/barrel (1 turil = 200 litres) Price increases depending on the elevation of the barrio.

Source: Walnycki (2013)

²'Ecological sanitation (ecosan) toilets' refers to a variety of sustainable sanitation system designs. According to Water Aid, 'the main features of ecosan are containment of waste, sanitisation and re-use as plant nutrients and soil stabilisers' (Water Aid Nepal 2008).

for extras such as street lighting. In District 8, 83 per cent of the population have access to electricity (Red Acción Comunitaria 2012).

There are certain social functions that the community has taken charge of. Public safety is an interminable problem; petty theft and street crime are widespread. There are only a few small police posts in the district, in Valle Hermoso, Lomas de Santa Bárbara, Nueva Santa Vera Cruz and Barrio San Miguel. These supposedly operate in coordination with the system of integrated police stations. According to an estimate made by World Vision (2012: 60), 'there is one police officer for every 7,727 residents. The authorities ought to be concerned about this shortage and try to find a solution to the problem'. In light of the partial policing in the region, community justice is commonplace in the region (see Goldstein 2012 for discussion).

In recent years the public works that have been prioritised in the district have focused on improving roads. In the new neighbourhoods, it is very common for communities to organise to build roads using their own initiative, with local residents providing the labour, and then to develop informal public transport. The presence and state of the roads are of course constraints affecting the provision of a public transport service. According to the assessment of transport in the southern zone (IIA: 2008, there are 'several lines and five types of public transport. The 30 routes, including

the railway, all arrive at the four supply hubs for the city's central market. Each bus line is served by an average of 45 vehicles, the minibus lines have 50 each and the fixed route taxis have 60 per line. Approximately 1,035 vehicles provide the public transport service to and from the district. Only 7 of the routes start and end in the district, and the rest start and end in districts 7, 14 and 8'.

A refuse collection service is mainly provided by OTBs rather than neighbourhood councils. The Municipal Sanitation Services Company of Cochabamba (EMSA) is responsible for providing this service and its work is complemented by three subcontracted microenterprises (Kantuta, Surumi and Mespai) each of which serves the OTBs and some neighbourhood councils. However, the service is ineffective. Anyone who walks around the district can see immediately that rubbish is thrown into improvised dumps and accumulates in the streets, streams, vacant lots, gullies, irrigation channels and even the river. Neither are there any fixed containers in place for collecting rubbish, while some families choose to burn their rubbish. Furthermore, there is no solid waste treatment system because the micro-enterprises are not responsible for it and neither is EMSA (Muñoz 2012: 5).

4

Community governance institutions in District 8

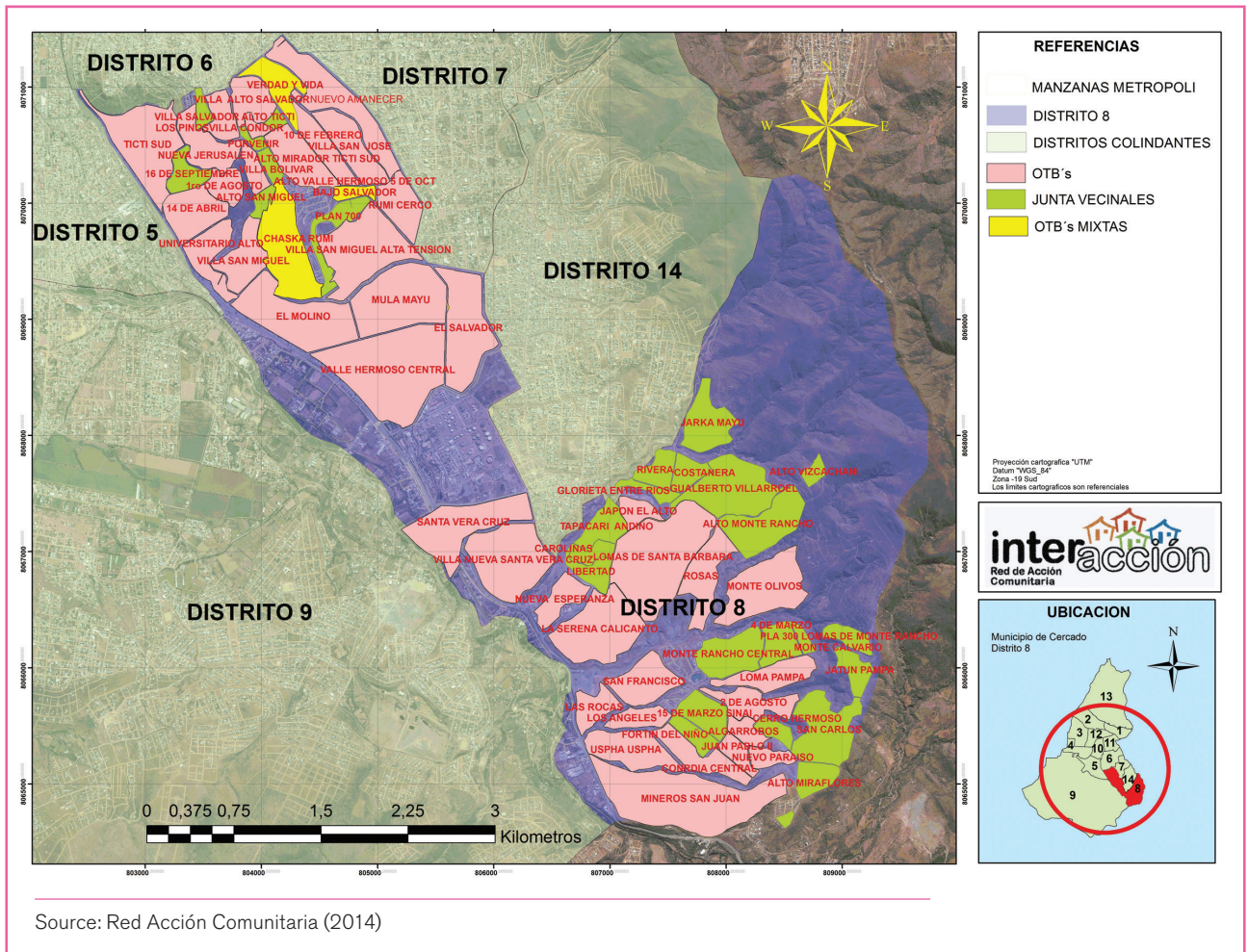
This paper now considers the formal and informal community institutions that have emerged around the LPP processes since 1994, before considering how they serve communities in District 8 of the southern zone.

It is difficult to get accurate figures for the formal and informal communities in the municipality of Cochabamba. In December 2013, the municipality of Cochabamba had 468 registered OTBs, but there are no official public figures for informal residents' associations (often known as *juntas vecinales*). In District 8 there are 72 communities, 41 of which are formally recognised as OTBs. The process of mapping the informal communities was undertaken as part of a joint initiative with Red de Accion Comunitaria, detailed in the following section. In principle, the district is divided into three large *mancomunidades* or groups of neighbourhoods: Serranía, Centro and Uspha Uspha. They were established following the LPP reforms to enable neighbourhoods to present demands and work together more cohesively around development and

planning, particularly basic service provision (including roads, water and sanitation, education and health) and to formalise and secure tenure. According to Isaac Maldonado, former director of planning in the municipal government, 'the residents who had settled on different areas of land got organised in *mancomunidades* to demand regularisation of their status, which is something else they have in common' (La Razón 2013). This type of organisation is also flexible because it is able to operate for a limited period of time, as determined by the needs and demands of each of the groups involved; communities can participate or withdraw and the *mancomunidad* might even dissolve itself. The 75 formal and informal neighbourhoods that make up District 8 are grouped according to their membership of the three *mancomunidades*.

The map in Figure 2 highlights the informal neighbourhood councils in District 8, which are excluded from popular participation resources and decision-making processes.

Figure 2. Map of informal neighbourhood councils in District 8



4.1 Formal and informal community governance structures and rights

In September 2014, a regularly updated joint study by the district mayor's office, the district council and the NGO Community Action Network identified a total of 72 neighbourhoods. However, it is worth noting the dynamic nature of the boundaries of formal and informal settlements in the region, as community frequently split or merge around conflict or for strategic gain. These have different characteristics and can be classified into the four types of neighbourhoods shown in Table 2.

This classification is based on two interlinked legal elements: a) the property rights situation, and b) whether the neighbourhoods have obtained official legal status. But there are also differences within this latter category, and thus the first major differentiation is between neighbourhood councils and OTBs, which account for 47 per cent and 53 per cent of all neighbourhoods respectively.

Table 2. Neighbourhoods in District 8, classified by legal status

TYPE	Nº
Neighbourhood councils	31
OTBs without property rights	17
Mixed OTBs	3
OTBs with property rights	21
Total	72

Source: prepared by authors based on RAC settlement profiles.

The 'informal' neighbourhood councils are those with the fewest legal rights, meaning that they have neither legal security nor official recognition as a neighbourhood organisation, and thus have no access to the per-capita decentralised resources that their formal OTB neighbours do. These committees are scattered throughout the district.

Three types of formal OTB can be identified in District 8, reflecting the realities of the southern zone:

- **OTBs without property rights:** although they have official legal status, they have not regularised their property rights. This is often as a result of long-term absent landlords and irresolvable land-rights disputes. This makes it more difficult for these communities to secure development projects, and this paper will demonstrate that these communities have consistently received less funding than the other two categories.
- **Mixed OTBs:** only four neighbourhoods were found to fall into this category, whereby property rights have been regularised for most of their territory but there is an area where people do not have property ownership documents. Again, this makes it more difficult for these communities to secure investment for projects and local development initiatives.
- **OTBs with property rights:** 23 neighbourhoods fall into this category and most of them are among the oldest in the district. Not only do they have property ownership documents but they have been able to use their legal status and decentralised finance to develop basic and collective services, although issues of quality and maintenance still remain to be addressed.

4.2 Community participation

Community participation in local development is commonplace in formal OTBs and informal residents' associations. Indeed, the men and women who live in each and every corner of the city are the grassroots members of a neighbourhood organisation; they are its reason for existence and its foundations. In the collective imagination, the neighbourhood organisation is often strong, well organised, democratic and participatory, regardless of what its status may be with regard to land ownership or whether or not it is legally recognised as a territorial organisation. This image is, however, often contradicted by the reality of half of the city's neighbourhoods that are organised as informal neighbourhood councils or *juntas vecinales*.

In informal neighbourhood councils, participation processes take shape in the absence of public authority or, as Goldstein puts it, the 'phantom presence' of the state in the neighbourhoods of District 8 (2014). The residents' compendium of basic needs thus requires that they are actively involved in efforts to improve the neighbourhood, whether by contributing money, labour, materials, tools or time. Often, during the first two years of the establishment of the community, people need to dedicate ample time to dealing with urgent issues such as building roads and pathways for water tankers and clearing or building a space for community meetings.

These are the actions that should, in the long term, enable them to claim the right to own their land and for it to belong to the neighbourhood.

4.2.1 The ABC of participation in low-income urban communities

The neighbourhood meetings in formal OTBs and informal neighbourhood councils are intended to be the means for residents to participate and take decisions about actions, arrangements and budgets to develop the barrio – in short, neighbourhood plans with a vision. By their very nature, these meetings imply participation. Participation at this level therefore takes on connotations that differ from what the theory assumes. In District 8 neighbourhoods, participation means attending meetings, keeping up to date with the payment of contributions to the development of basic services, and working collectively to improve the neighbourhood. In this sense, 'participation' refers to getting involved or being physically present in local development planning.

There is a culture of confrontation, dispute and egotism, where the loser is often the poorest person or the one who has no family connections, as it is very common for extended family groups to live in the same neighbourhood. The languages spoken at the meetings are Spanish and Quechua. Language is undoubtedly a factor that limits people's understanding of the issues being discussed and, especially in the case of women, inhibits people from speaking out to express their opinions. Dialogue, the exchange of ideas, decisions and leaders encouraging people to join in are often absent. The main protagonist is the president of the neighbourhood council, while the members or residents are passive listeners. Formal OTBs and informal neighbourhood councils all have presidents who are elected in by residents.

Despite this, attendance at meetings tends to be high, precisely because of people's disadvantaged status and their illegality. The processes here mirror the formal participatory processes that are expected in OTBs. Attending meetings is no longer a priority in more mature barrios because people have already secured titles to their property and legal status as an OTB. Here, meetings tend to take place in response to extraordinary situations that affect the majority of the residents or when they have made a commitment to the district council. Nominations for the president are put forward by community members, and voted on by residents. Presidents have to be seen to bring in funds and projects to the barrio, or else they can be ousted by community members. Presidents of formal OTBs are paid for their role, and this position can provide a springboard into public office, so it is not uncommon to find OTB presidents in District 8 who do not reside in the barrio that they represent.

Neighbourhood council meetings normally take place once a month on Sundays, except in the newer, less consolidated neighbourhoods, where the meetings are every fortnight or more frequently, depending on the urgency. Ninety-three per cent of people surveyed attend these meetings. However, they explain that attendance is not voluntary but instead based on their fear that their land will be taken away or that they will be fined by the neighbourhood council. The majority of those who attend are women, either because the male head of household is working or resting after work or because many of them are single mothers. The 7 per cent who do not participate explain that they are tenants, or have become disillusioned by the poor management of the neighbourhood, or have personal problems with the neighbourhood president.

These residents' meetings have some particular features: they are both ritual and informal at the same time; the meeting is called early in the morning and lasts until midday, or until mid-afternoon when there is community work to be done; and they last an average of six hours. The monthly Sunday meetings are sacrosanct and begin by setting off firecrackers to reiterate the call for people to attend, and start at 'Bolivian time,' meaning 'when most people have arrived'.

In newer neighbourhoods, the day continues with community work, usually involving cleaning, the need for which increases in the rainy season, concluding with another rollcall of those present. There is a myth that *ayni* or communal labour is characteristic of low-income urban groups. However, their own survival strategies mean that it is difficult for them to show solidarity or commit time and money. They join in the communal work for fear of the sanctions and fines.

Much of the time is taken up with collecting the obligatory monthly contribution everyone must pay. This is a tradition carried on from the miners' and farmers' unions and is known as the members' 'union fee'. The money is used to cover the transport and other costs involved in the work done by the organisation's leaders. The amount of the contributions varies greatly in different parts of the district. This working paper found neighbourhoods where each member pays the equivalent of US\$6.00 a year, but there are also monthly contributions of US\$1.00. Depending on the number of inhabitants, these contributions can easily amount to US\$300, which is more than the monthly minimum wage in these neighbourhoods.

4.2.2 The neighbourhood at the micro level: complaints and inaction

The formal process of decentralisation has developed around the idea that the *dirigentes* or OTB community leaders bring communities closer to public authorities. The leaders are tasked with securing public works for

the neighbourhood, as well as representing them in second-tier organisations such as the district council or in dealings with local authorities, and other spaces in which people assume that 'things get decided'. Local residents commented that they find it difficult to complain or demand accountability, because the president might threaten to resign. This would cause a setback in any processes or negotiations underway. In some barrios the local residents have organised themselves and removed ineffective leaders, but this is the exception to the rule in District 8.

Community members also find it difficult to find the time to question the authority of community leaders and to engage in local planning processes because they are busy working during the day. Another weighty factor is the fear and timidity that results from their lack of knowledge and information about how the municipal government works. The ability to speak Spanish fluently is no less relevant. The local residents do not know the district mayor or the president of the district council personally. They do not know what roles they play or how building relationships with them could improve their neighbourhood, but it is also true that they are not interested.

4.2.3 Local residents' needs and demands

Local residents were asked about their demands, which are formulated on the basis of their needs. The two most immediate demands have to do with their material living conditions: access to water (37 per cent) and road improvements (22 per cent). Another is more subjective and has to do with the symbolic household security people hope they will achieve when their property rights are regularised (17 per cent).

Most respondents hope to have a water supply in their homes one day. At the moment they have water delivered by water vendors. Residents feel that the issue of road improvements is urgent, because in the rainy season it is difficult to access already-scarce public transport and the water tankers are unable to enter the neighbourhood. Then there are deeper concerns about the permanence of the community, and uncertainty around the scope to establish stable homes and communities at both the individual and the collective level. This often becomes central to the work of the neighbourhood councils. In the first case, there is the threat of residents being expelled as a result of getting into arrears with the payment of their union fees, or for having bought property from the first owner (something that is widespread but prohibited) or for appropriating abandoned land. Linked to this is the property rights situation at the community level, and the complex nature of securing land rights in the southern zone requires expensive consultation with lawyers, architects or

Table 3. Local residents' immediate demands

	#	PER CENT
Regularisation of property rights	19	17
Basic services	42	37
Road improvements	29	25
Building works	14	12
Other	10	9
TOTAL	114	100

Source: prepared by the authors based on survey data

municipal government staff. Furthermore, it can take years or decades for these processes to be resolved.

A tour of District 8's neighbourhoods and a review of spending on municipal public works reveal that the public works projects that have been carried out often fail to reflect these complex needs. They tend to be paving short stretches of road, creating sports fields and stand-alone roofing. Providing a counterpart contribution is a requirement, as the municipal government funds are not sufficient to complete projects, which also means that many of these projects are constructed in the wealthier and better-organised communities.

The neighbourhoods that are able to access funding are clearly those that have official legal status: the OTBs. The informal neighbourhood councils are able to access some heavy machinery allocated to them for a day or

two at a time, thanks to their contacts with members of the district council or the district mayor's office. In short, the main way for informal neighbourhood councils to improve their neighbourhood is to do it themselves.

4.3 Decentralised institutions: how formal and informal communities engage with the state

District-level planning takes place in municipal offices or community houses. Established in 1997, the Alejo Calatayud Office covers District 5 and District 8 and has the remit to commission public works, administration services, legal advice, and some cultural, education,

BOX 1. SECURING LAND AND LAND RIGHTS IN LOW-INCOME SETTLEMENTS IN DISTRICT 8

Informal neighbourhood councils or *juntas vecinales* have to secure tenure to regularise and access the planning processes and resources that have been decentralised by the state. In principle, five types of land ownership are recognised in District 8: community ownership, small private property, large estates, municipal government ownership and several adjacent properties with different owners. In practice, the information provided by local residents for this working paper indicates that the majority of the neighbourhoods are either former or current properties of the municipal government. Squatting and spontaneous settlement do not appear to be widespread in District 8. A review of the legal situation of the land occupied by the neighbourhood councils

shows that a significant percentage have settled on land owned by the municipal government. This is the case for the following neighbourhoods: Los Pinos, Cóndor, Porvenir, Florida, Los Olivos, Mirador, Plan 700 and Alto Plan 700, which are located on greenbelt land. There are also cases where the land has several owners and six neighbourhoods where the landowners remain unknown.

Most neighbourhood councils and OTBs acquired their land in similar ways; 95 per cent of those interviewed bought land from black market dealers, who then disappeared and returned after a time in the guise of neighbourhood leaders.

sports, social and health services. On the administration side, the emphasis of the work is on regularisation, approving construction plans, and issuing registration documents and operating licences.

The oversight committee and the district council exist to represent all local communities, formal and informal, and to negotiate directly with municipal government officials and technical staff. The district council is an organisation that predates the enactment of the Popular Participation Law. Following the enactment of Law 1551, the district council managed to survive and its structure gives it the status of the most important grassroots organisation in the district: ‘The purpose of this organisation is to promote human development in its territorial jurisdiction, with the aim of improving the quality of life and the standard of living of its inhabitants’ (PMDD 1999).

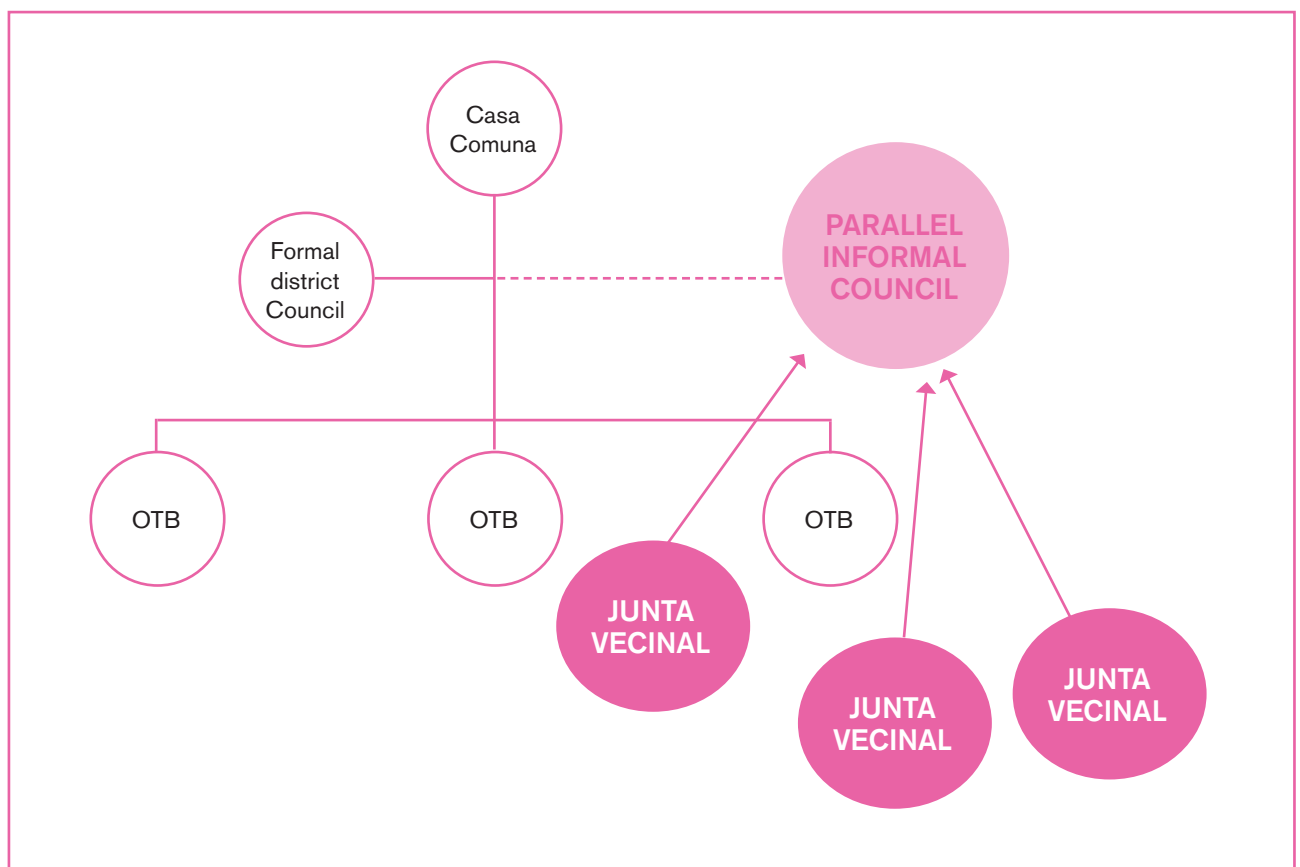
As its name suggests, the municipal council currently represents 32 neighbourhood councils and 41 OTBs that are legally established and recognised, making a total of 73 neighbourhoods. However, the exact number of neighbourhoods may vary as informal communities may merge or split at any time with the aim of obtaining

official legal status or to secure funding for public works projects. This existence of the municipal council suggests that informal communities can engage with the local development processes, in principle at least, but in practice representing the complex and unequal needs of communities with diverse legal statuses is particularly complex.

Since 2014, the District 8 council has two competing sets of councillors, one formal and one informal, both elected by community leaders in 2014: the formal council in February and the informal council in March. Each council disputes the representation of certain neighbourhoods which has manifested in all-out confrontation at some points. These parallel structures are also replicated at the level of neighbourhood representatives. This means that some neighbourhoods even have two presidents, which is confusing for local residents and undermines local democratic processes.

“... the council is a trampoline for local leader to reach public office. These parallel structures monopolise everything and they don't let new people come to the fore. Interview with a president of a junta vecinal, July 2014

Figure 3. Formal and informal councils at the district level



Members of the first set of councillors are leaders with a long track record, some of whom are thought to be the original settlers who appropriated and carved up the land for the development of housing, and they mainly represent OTBs. The members of the second set of councillors, in contrast, are young representatives who are leaders of informal neighbourhood councils. This demonstrates how informal communities seek to contest and destabilise the weak institutions of decentralisation in the region, but also how formal communities are unwilling to make space for new or informal communities.

According to the statutes, the council cabinet is made up of 20 portfolio posts, but both of these parallel councils have a larger number of representatives. Certain differences and similarities can be noted between them. One of the similarities is that both of these parallel councils have appointed political secretaries – an unrecognised post that is extraordinary within what is supposed to be an apolitical organisational structure. This reflects the fact that the councils have to align themselves with the government – in the words of one leader, ‘if you’re not with the government you get nothing’. These secretaries have developed to act as intermediaries or mediators, both with municipal government authorities and with MAS political party officials.

4.3.1 The changing role of informal neighbourhood councils

Bolivia’s informal neighbourhood councils can associate with a National Confederation of Neighbourhood Councils (CONALJUVE), which has historically been an influential player in the development of cities. CONALJUVE lost some influence following the approval of the Popular Participation Law in 1994, which created OTBs, oversight committees and municipal districts with the aim of involving residents more closely in local government through the allocation of funds for implementing public works projects.

Despite this, the neighbourhood councils have retained some influence in local development planning processes, with a vision that is often more practical than political. Since the election of Evo Morales in 2006, a new legal framework to regulate NGOs and social movements has been developed assigning new leading roles to certain non-urban social movements, which does not include CONALJUVE, making it more difficult for low-income and informal urban communities to shape development agendas.

4.3.2 Decentralised planning at the district level

The leaders of all the neighbourhoods in District 8 – informal neighbourhood councils and formal OTBs – come into contact with each other in the honourable district council, a decentralised organisation affiliated to the Cochabamba federation of neighbourhood councils. As the coordinating body, the council’s role is to channel the interests or demands of the urban communities to the authorities in the municipal government. There are only three neighbourhoods whose representatives do not attend the meetings of district council, alleging a lack of legitimacy and inaction. The district council has many roles and responsibilities, some of the most important of which include drawing up the annual public works plan for the district (POA) based on each neighbourhood’s priorities; planning projects that will have a social impact; and exercising the corresponding social oversight of the public works projects that are carried out and monitoring how funds are spent.

The council recognises the steering committees of the neighbourhood councils and OTBs and coordinates the preparation and implementation of projects and public works with other institutions. It may also act as an intermediary for obtaining additional funds from public and private institutions. Seventy presidents from around the district – only a few (5 per cent) of whom are women – attend the council’s meetings regularly. Indeed, one of the principal failures of decentralisation has been its ineffectiveness to address the issue of women’s representation in political life. The long history of male-orientated decision-making and planning processes and the common phenomenon of violence against women are frequently posited critiques of the effectiveness of the decentralisation process in the early 2000s (Rikard and Lalander 2002: 90). In District 8, it appears that little has changed.

Of the OTB community leaders in District 8 surveyed for this paper, 52 per cent managed to get their demands included in the POA annual work plan for last year. The public works projects that were prioritised for 2014 were mainly road improvements, the construction of sports fields with stand-alone roofing and drainage systems. Community leaders said that issues such as the regularisation of property rights are not addressed in the POA; instead, they tend to be resolved through political connections. Community leaders also said that after nine years of the ruling political party MAS being in control of the municipal government, it is difficult to obtain funding for any public works project unless leaders have secured the patronage of governing party chiefs.

Advances in relation to the POA in 2014 were slow and hampered by a series of on-going disputes relating to community leadership, the parallelism that has emerged between the formal and informal council of leaders, and a failure to address land rights and land titling. The divisions between formal OTBs and informal communities in District 8 underpinned the lack of coordinated development planning in District 8 in 2014. As previously outlined, the OTBs and the informal neighbourhood councils have formed two parallel blocks, impeding integrated development at the district level. Neighbourhood council leaders indicate that they are the minority and must abide by what the majority approves. However, this research has revealed that numerically the neighborhood councils and organisations are on a par with the OTBs, but as they have not resolved their legal land-title status they are unable to negotiate for their development needs.

At the community level, progress around public works and projects granted as part of the POA can be undermined by weak leadership and appropriation of power. There are examples of neighbourhood leaders having developed projects in coordination with engineers in the local council, so that public works can begin, only to be usurped by a new community leader who claims the project as their own or promises new projects in an attempt to win local support. The conflict

that ensues between 'leaders' as a result often serves to paralyse development processes at the community level.

The unwillingness and incapacity of the state to address disputes linked to land rights continues to undermine local plans for development projects and to secure development finances for informal communities. Indeed, there are examples of communities in District 8 with irresolvable tenure status challenges that span over a decade. Consequently, resources are rarely distributed in response to need, because without legal OTB status, community-based organisations receive little or no decentralised financial resources from the state. The neighborhood councils that are able to build some links to the district council may be able to obtain funding but the process is not straightforward. For starters the councils have to regularly attend district council meetings; they must develop good relationships with members of the council; any resources must be approved by all members of the council; and the communities have to prove that the work will be executed in a manner that will have an impact not only in their neighbourhood but also in others. In many cases, the economic resources received are insufficient, or, as some leaders have indicated, 'neighbourhood councils receive the crumbs from the OTBs' table'.

5

Informal community responses to planning, development and basic services

This paper has thus far set out some of the processes that exclude informal communities from local development planning, resources and rights. The experiences of communities in District 8 demonstrates that dysfunctional governance structures and clientelism underpins the unequal distribution of resources, and that projects and investments often do not reflect the needs of community members particularly the most marginalised. This paper now moves to explore how the deficiencies of decentralisation and LPP reforms have shaped the development of informal community institutions and responses by low-income urban communities, in an attempt to identify and meet specific development needs. It specifically considers the emergence of informal water providers, known as water committees, and their endeavours to develop and co-produce water services with the state. It also considers the use of mapping and profiling by certain neighbourhood councils in District 8 to leverage resources and gain political recognition by the state.

Low-income communities across the southern zone have engaged in a range of processes to drive local development that often seek the support of NGO or state support to varying degrees to deepen impact and achieve scale. Generally, community institutions have

been able to delicately negotiate partnerships with national and local government actors, secure further resources and strategically engage with the state for political recognition and even rights. Conversely, it has been difficult to develop and maintain participatory practices in recently established communities with limited financial resources, where social structures and bonds between neighbours are weak, and where communities have not agreed on local development priorities. This section considers two community-led processes that have engaged with national and local government institutions, beyond the established LPP structures to drive local development processes.

5.1 Participatory partnerships for water services

The significant presence of local and international NGOs focussed on supporting communities to deliver water services reflects the absence of formal water and sanitation services in the southern zone. The region is unserved by the municipal provider SEMAPA, and

relies on informal water services such as vendors and community water networks that draw on groundwater or buy water in bulk to be distributed to each household using community funds, mutual aid, NGO assistance or even using diverse forms of state finance.

Community water providers began emerging when people first began populating the southern zone during the 1980s, but recently about 200 have been georeferenced in the region (Ledo 2013) while the state has identified 189 (MMAYA 2013). They are managed and financed in varying ways, including informal community-based institutions, small cooperatives, and a small proportion – 15 per cent according to Ledo (2013) – are partially financed and managed by OTBs. In the years following the so-called Water War (see Box 3), international finance from NGOs and development agencies became available and local NGOs and foundations emerged to support the work of community water providers in the southern zone.

The committees provided an alternative model for water service provision for low-income communities. By the mid-2000s, social organisations and foundations focused on water services for the southern zone began emerging, including one which federated up to 50 community water providers (ASICASUDD-EPSAS or the Association of Community Water Systems of the South and Water and Sanitation Providers) and the April Foundation of Cochabamba which was started with funds from international labour unions. These organisations supported water committees to work collectively to share practices, and also to engage cautiously with the national government in an attempt to secure financial and practical support, and to shape water policy.

Since the election of Evo Morales in 2006, the subsequent establishment of a ministry for the environment and water, and the constitutionalisation of the right to water, the Bolivian government has, in principle, sought to recognise the role of such community water providers. New national capacity building institutions for small-scale providers, a process of licences and registration for community water providers, and even some national finance has been provided to improve infrastructure (see Walnycki 2013). The national government has used donor finance to support and develop community providers in the southern zone. Funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was used to fund a pipeline to connect some community-managed water networks in the southern zone to larger infrastructure in 2012, although in 2015 residents are still waiting for water to flow to their community systems. Meanwhile, European Union funding for infrastructure upgrading was channelled to 30 community water providers through the federation of community water providers ASICASUDD-EPSAS, leading to over 8,000 new household connections by 2012, although the association has since disbanded.

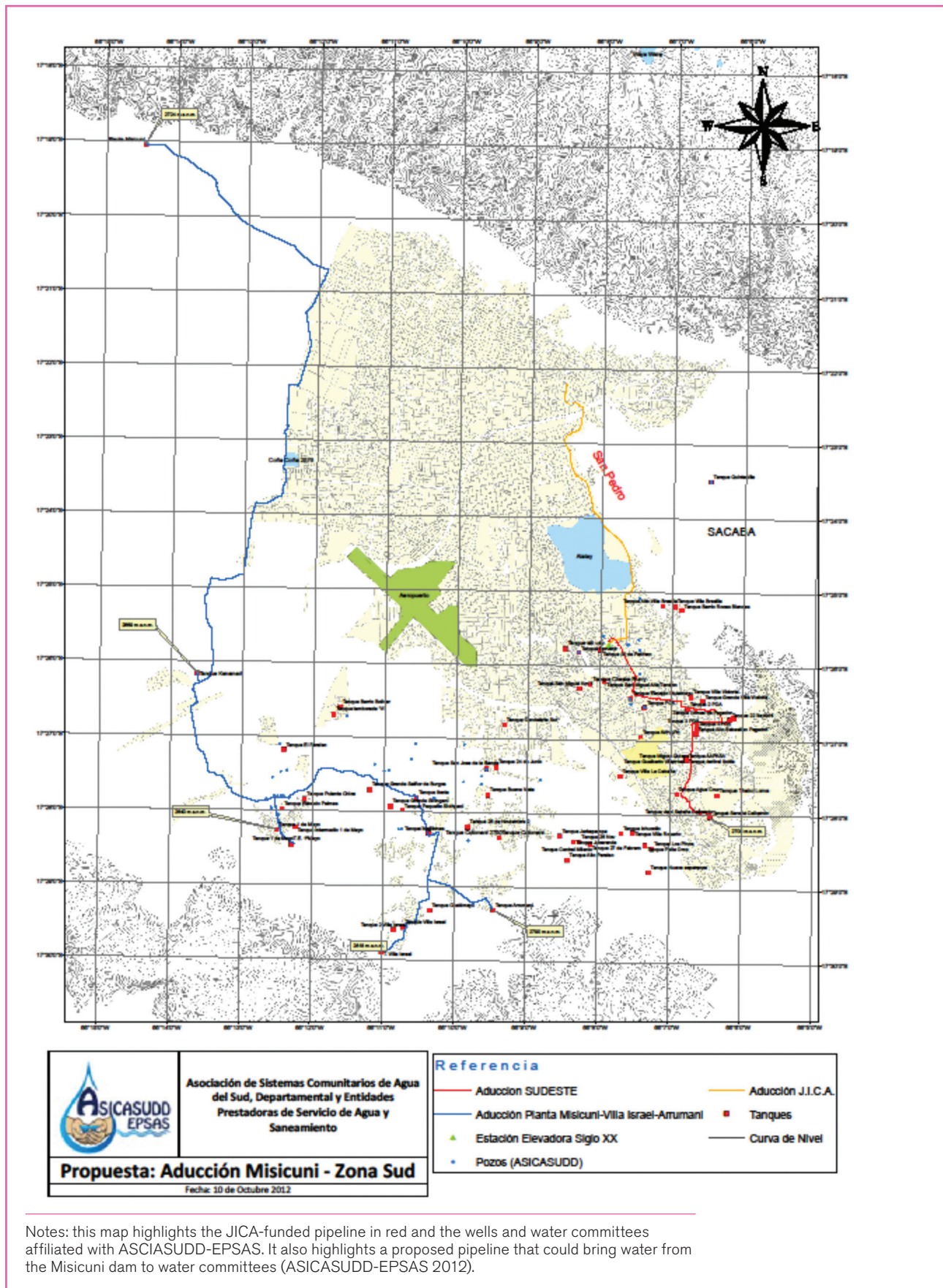
It is thus possible to conceptualise a spectrum of engagement between formal and informal water committees and the state around the production of water services. In some instances there is latent support for community water services inasmuch as the state will tolerate communities using LPP funding to upgrade water services. But there are also examples of more strategic engagement around community water services, whereby the national government has supported the construction of mainline water infrastructure to channel municipal water to community water networks.

BOX 2. THE COCHABAMBA WATER WAR

During the mid-1990s, Bolivia came under pressure from the World Bank to privatise water service provision in Cochabamba, as a precondition of debt relief packages from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Shultz and Draper 2009). In 1999, the Cochabamba contract was awarded to the sole bidder, Bechtel, which was granted exclusive rights both to provide water services and also to all of the water sources in Cochabamba, including the aquifer in the region. The concession included plans to develop the Masicuni Dam for hydropower, irrigation and potable water on the outskirts of the city. The cost of the dam, combined with a contractual ruling against public subsidies to protect customers against price hikes, meant that bills increased by 200 per

cent in some communities within two months of the concession being granted. Numerous urban and rural communities that relied on local water sources rose up in opposition to the concession and the appropriation of resources, and these protests were to develop into what was called the Water War. This urban–rural alliance became known as the Coordinadora del Agua and eventually forced the annulment of the concession in 2001. Cochabambinos earned themselves an international reputation as the world’s ‘water warriors’ (Finnegan 2002), and the water war would come to play a central role in anti-privatisation narratives and struggles in subsequent years.

Figure 4. Map showing water pipelines, wells and tanks



Notes: this map highlights the JICA-funded pipeline in red and the wells and water committees affiliated with ASCIASUDD-EPAS. It also highlights a proposed pipeline that could bring water from the Misicuni dam to water committees (ASICASUDD-EPAS 2012).

The parallel presence of formal and informal service providers and institutions means that some aspects of everyday life are delivered by the state and others by the community, and others are undertaken by both. This has led to a sort of 'inter-legality', that is when the state borrows from the juridical elements of non-state actors, and vice versa (Assies *et al.* 2000). OTBs have been formed in rural areas by building on indigenous *ayllu* councils. Meanwhile, an urban OTB might decide to use LPP funds to develop a community water system. The system might resemble an informal community water committee inasmuch as it is governed according to local uses and customs, but it will be funded using state finance and developed using technical advice from the local government. These organisations exist in the absence of the state, but also in parallel with the state, a feature of the juridical pluralism that is said to characterise Bolivia (Regalsky 2009). In District 8 it is commonplace to find a community with a formal neighbourhood council or OTB, and a second community organisation that manages the water service. The informal water committee manages only one aspect of everyday life.

Community water provision flourished during the late 1990s and early 2000s, and consequently many of these community water providers exist within communities that are now formal OTBs. As such, it is important to note that these are not the poorest communities in the region. Indeed, there is a notable absence of support for water and sanitation projects in the newly established informal communities in the hills on the edge of District 8. In practice these communities draw on public and co-produced basic services to meet their needs.

5.2 Mapping, profiling and savings for upgrading, recognition and rights

The NGO Red Acción Comunitaria (RAC) was established in 2010 to support grassroots community processes in low-income peri-urban areas. The NGO is an affiliate of the international network Shack/Slum Dwellers International and it has drawn on the practices of women-led savings groups and community-led data collection to galvanise these community processes.³ RAC's aim is to work with residents in the most marginalised communities that do not have access to LPP resources. It works to support local community processes such as community savings schemes, and

to galvanise informal community institutions such as the neighbourhood councils, so that they are better placed to engage with local government around land rights and local development plans to improve basic services, and ultimately to recognise the rights and needs of informal communities.

In light of this, it is interesting to note that over the course of three consecutive presidential terms, the political space in which social organisations and movements that are not affiliated with the MAS to operate appears to have diminished. NGOs and social organisations report that new legislative measures to regulate NGOs and social movements are undermining their actions. This has been accompanied by state denunciations of NGOs and indigenous social movements i.e. that they have been planted to undermine the state (Achtenberg 2014). It appears that it has become increasingly difficult for NGOs or social movements operating beyond the community level to develop their operations to national or sub-national levels, as they have been curtailed by regulation, bureaucracy and financial red tape. Furthermore, a 2013 NGO law and presidential decree has granted the Bolivian government broad powers to be able to dissolve nongovernmental organization (see Human Rights Watch 2015).

Non-state community organisations in low-income and informal settlements have to tread lightly and strategically to establish relationships with the state. Tejiendo Ciudades is a network of women-led savings groups that are supported by RAC. These savings groups emerged on the fringe of District 8, in some of the most recently established informal settlements, some of which have been in existence for only five years. As noted earlier in this paper, informal neighbourhood councils are unable to access resources through the district council. City maps held by the municipality only represent the 40 recognised OTBs; 33 neighbourhood councils did not exist or were not formally recognised in 2001 (see Figure 2).

The savings groups began by developing and undertaking community profiles, to document the local demographic and community development needs.⁴ Over time, the data that has been collected has been used to push for the recognition of 33 informal communities by the deputy mayor's office, and municipal government. Initial attempts at profiling neighbourhoods were met with opposition from a community leader who had previously been supportive. The survey revealed that some community members had been subdividing and re-selling plots, without consulting with other community

³ For more information see: <http://sdinet.org>

⁴ The profiling process were developed by SDI. A settlement profile is developed through group discussions with community members to get a general idea of the size and level of infrastructure present in the settlement. After the profile is completed, community discussions are held to verify the results and discuss settlement development priorities. Further details and examples of mapping in other settings can be found here <http://sdinet.org/sdi-focus/profiling-and-mapping/>

members. This information was perceived by community leaders to be dangerous, because it could undermine community relations and attempts to formalise the barrio, because the practice of subdividing and re-selling plots breaks local land laws and norms. These community norms exist to ensure that low-income individuals can continue to access land in the barrio, and so that community members can continue to influence who lives locally.

Community leaders were similarly cautious about the community mapping process that was to follow, and how this information could undermine their position and local development processes. In 2011, the group developed a simple and sensitive community profiling system which was the product of delicate negotiations between the savings groups and local leaders and the district council, reflecting local concerns and realities. Although the communities own the data, they have been working openly with the local authorities around the questions and format of the profiles and to develop the maps with the support of a local university.

The ensuing years have been characterised by local political instability and high levels of staff turn-over within local government. While previous deputy mayors have used the profiles, the NGO that supports the community groups has had to start from scratch with the new deputy mayor around the value and use of the profiles. In that sense, the groups frame the profiles as a pretext and means to engage with the state around the need to channel more resources to certain communities, and to recognise the existence and needs of informal communities in District 8. This is a tricky game; often local civil servants and community leaders do not want to hear or recognise these communities, because this could undermine the established structures of governance that clearly benefit some groups over others. Profiles can reveal the extent to which decentralised resources have been effective in low-income communities, while maps reveal how local authorities have failed to formalise and continue to exclude almost half of the communities in District 8 from basic services and state resources. Meanwhile, OTB leaders who are already competing with each other for

BOX 3. THE INFORMAL JUNTA VECINAL CAROLINAS

Carolinas can be found in the steep hills on the edge of District 8, about 8km from the centre of the city. It was established in 2009 and has 96 plots, 66 of which had homes constructed on them at the time of writing. There is no potable water here and communities rely on water vendors. The elevation means that during the rainy season roads are often washed away or impassable. Ninety

per cent of the current population have migrated from other parts of the department of Cochabamba. The community savings scheme here has been instrumental in providing finance for the construction and development of houses, and the design and development of a community toilet block. This community is not recognised by the state nor is it able to access popular participation finance.



Carolinas, September 2014 © María Eugenia Torrico

decentralised resources have little interest in supporting the formalisation of informal communities, as they present further competition for resources.

The profiles that have been developed by community members have been central to the community-level upgrading programmes that are funded through local savings groups. As outlined in the first half of this paper the neighbourhood councils have no means of accessing resources from the state until they have established their right to the land and have OTB status.

The savings groups provide a means by which local women can start building savings which provide capital for loans to upgrade their homes and the homes of their neighbours – detailed below. This paper earlier touched on the absence of female participation in neighbourhood meetings, and demonstrated how the district council is dominated by male community leaders and that processes can be underpinned by violence (see Goldstein 2004). Nonetheless, women-led savings groups have emerged as informal organisations that sit alongside informal neighbourhood associations. Savings groups also provide a focal point for communities to develop collective upgrading initiatives and to develop partnerships with local organisations and NGOs, but also to develop a relationship with local government. Women in communities across the southern zone of Cochabamba meet to save on a weekly basis. The funds saved are available for women to take out loans at a low interest rate for building, extending and upgrading homes in emerging barrios on the fringe of Cochabamba.

The process is relatively new and exists at a small scale. Indeed, there is no significant history of savings groups in the district or in Bolivia, and so the concept was initially greeted with some caution. This is underpinned by the fact that the Bolivian state is often seen as a benefactor; government funds and programmes are widespread but they are unequally distributed and, as this paper has demonstrated, resources rarely reach the poorest urban communities. However, women here are engaged in upgrading as part of the work funded by the savings groups which builds on the culture of mutual aid and community labour. While the savings groups are supported by a local NGO, local women now manage their own funds, and to date no one has defaulted on a loan. The groups have subsequently decided that they want to be recognised as a social organisation, so that they can advance some of the practical and strategic themes that they are engaged in. Recent legislative reform means that only the national president may recognise social movements, and there is no application process. Consequently, most recently anointed social movements are loyal to MAS. Therefore, the savings groups have decided to focus on the technical aspects of their work, continuing with mapping and profiles, and now they are looking to develop their savings fund into a community bank, which would be owned and managed by local women.

Table 4. Community savings and loans from communities across the southern zone (US\$)

Year	Accumulated capital	Amount saved	No. of loans	Amount loaned	No of with-drawals	Amount withdrawn	Interest	Refunds	Total
2014	6512,26	6823,18	66	4121,45	39	8487,7	150,86	629,02	4998,59
2015*	5449,16	7318,59	98	7710,14	42	4898,51	353,65	121,74	8137,39

6

The challenge ahead: how to bridge decentralisation with grassroots processes

The shortcomings of popular participation in low-income urban areas have led to the development of weak formal institutions for the implementation of decentralisation. The active exclusion of low-income communities from the benefits of popular participation and decentralisation serves to sustain informal institutions and service providers. There are significant legal and institutional challenges that make it difficult for informal communities to become an OTB that can access decentralised LPP funds. Communities thus rely on institutions such as informal neighbourhood councils, community savings groups, or water committees that emulate their formal counterparts which contribute to the juridical plurality and complexity that undermines integrated planning at the district level.

Popular participation has made it difficult for communities and civil society to participate in local development processes beyond the OTB. Civil society organisations have to engage with local government on an ad-hoc basis. They draw on a range of delicately negotiated partnerships with communities and local government to drive local development and fill basic service gaps. In practice there is a spectrum of state-citizen partnerships, ranging from tolerance by the state to more strategic partnerships that could

be developed. These have the potential to deepen participatory processes in low-income areas, and build more integrated development plans at the district level. However, there are increasingly limited opportunities for this as a result of emerging national reforms to regulate NGOs and civil society organisations.

For communities in low-income neighbourhoods in the southern zone of Cochabamba, the state is partially present and manifest in forms perceived to be punitive, for example laws and regulations that fail to serve the poorest. But the state is absent inasmuch as it fails to guarantee civil and human rights (see Goldstein 2012) and basic services or land tenure through weak institutions of decentralisation. This inter-legality and partial presence of the state in these communities promotes insecurity at a local level and breeds mistrust between citizens and the state. There were significant hopes that the waves of popular uprisings during the 2000s against neoliberal reforms, including the Water War and the election of Evo Morales in 2006, would lead to a revolution at the state level. The reforms that have followed over three presidential terms have failed to transform the state and have been uncomfortably reminiscent of past governments for social movements (Aguilar 2014) and community organisations. At the

community level, weak institutions and inadequate representation of community needs continues to undermine decentralised development processes at the local level. Meanwhile, despite the introduction of the right to land and the right to housing in the Bolivian constitution, there has been insufficient engagement with marginalised low-income groups such as those RAC work with; RAC continues to struggle to promote grassroots development processes for informal communities, and to secure land rights, so that these groups can be formally recognised.

Alternative community-led processes have emerged in informal settlements in part because of the shortcomings of popular participation as documented earlier in this paper, specifically in terms of representation and resource allocation. In the same instance, alternative community endeavours struggle to deliver tangible solutions to development challenges because of the increased regulation of non-state actors. Communities are encouraged to formalise and to achieve legal tenure despite the fact that this is a slow and bureaucratic process that may never be realised for some. The alternative pathway is for communities to forge community organisations to develop solutions that challenge these inequitable structures. Collective forms of organising, focussed on consolidating information

and a local resource base (in the form of savings), has proven to be an effective means of engaging with local governments. These forms of organising have practical and strategic benefits for urban poor groups as demonstrated by the experiences of the women's savings groups. But there are specific challenges that slow the process. There is a long history of political patronage and a beneficial state in these barrios, the fruits of which have been unevenly distributed, and which underpins mutual aid and community-level organising in informal settlements in the southern zone. The partial presence of the state also makes it difficult for grassroots processes to develop at scale, which is increasingly insupportable for the informal communities such as Carolinas on the edge of the city. Morales has been credited internationally with tripling the size of the Bolivian economy since his election in 2006, and has embarked on an extensive redistributive programme of public works and social welfare (Shipani, 2014). However, the ways in which these programmes will include and provide services to the most marginalised urban households and communities have yet to be realised. Informal community-based institutions are seeking to participate in planning and the delivery of basic services. The challenge lies in reconciling and linking these diverging processes.

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Related reading

Rights on the edge of the city: the right to water and the peri-urban water committees of Cochabamba by Anna Walnycki available at <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10758IIED.pdf>

Popular participation was introduced in Bolivia in 1994 as part of comprehensive decentralising reforms. At the time the state, international development donors and commentators suggested that popular participation and decentralisation could help alleviate poverty and inequality, democratise governance and planning processes, and even empower citizens. Over two decades later, the impacts are disputed. There has been extensive analysis of the often-positive implications for low-income rural communities – alongside criticism of the weak institutions and corruption that can undermine the process. There has been less reflection on the impact that this process has had on the development of low-income and informal urban communities. This paper outlines how popular participation has been deployed unequally across low-income, peri-urban settlements in the southern zone of Cochabamba. It considers how low-income communities have developed parallel informal participatory institutions at the community level to identify and meet their development needs.

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