**Interview with Caralampia and Facunda**

Place: House of Caralampia and Facunda

Date and time: 14 February, beginning at 17:40 hrs

Duration: 1:01:32 mins

Additional observation notes: The interview is at the home of Caralampia Mondongo & Facunda, who are mother and daughter. Caralampia Mondongo, the daughter, was the one who contacted me for the interview, and she told me that it would be good if her mother was also there. That was possible and we had the interview in the living room of their house. When I arrived at her house, she told me that she also wanted one of her neighbours to be involved in the interview, and that she had asked her and she had said yes, but in the end she could not reach her, so the interview will only be with her and her mother. As we prepare for the interview, she goes to look for her neighbour one last time to see if she can join us, but she can't find her. While she goes to look for her, I wait with Facunda and we talk a bit before the interview starts. I explain what it will be about and what the objectives of the thesis are, as well as the interview. When Caralampia returns, we start the interview with the two of them. Facunda is a senior citizen. At the end of the interview, Caralampia tells me that it used to be a huge anguish not to have water. That they had to get up in the early hours of the morning to hear if water was running into the cistern. Maybe she writes a reflection on that, but not a participant diary.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Caralampia [C], Facunda [F]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: Well, first of all I thank you for taking the time to have this interview, this conversation. To begin with, I could ask you to introduce yourselves and give some very general information about yourselves, your name, your age.

C: You mum [to Facunda].

F: I am Facunda

C: Well, I'm Caralampia. I am 45 years old. I'm from Pedregal Santo Domingo, Coyoacán. I'm a preschool teacher and a collaborator at the popular community centre. And I am a member of the Water Defence Committee of Pedregal Santo Domingo.

A: Thank you both very much. If you want, we can begin. Facunda was telling me that she is originally from San Luis.

F: Yes, from San Luis. Near Tamazunchale.

A: So can you tell me a little bit about how you came to Santo Domingo?

F: I got married, and here I arrived, in fact, here in this neighbourhood. It was newly founded. It was made of stone and earth, but very little earth. There was almost more stone than earth.

A: And back then, in those early years, how did you get water?

F: We went to where there was, by Ajusco, there were some taps. And that's where we would go to get water, because there wasn't any here. There weren't any of those taps yet. That's where we would go. When we could get them. And when we couldn't, we ran out of water. And we had to get up early to find water. Yes, it was difficult. At the beginning it was difficult. In those early years.

A: Then later on, I imagine, the water trucks and pipes came in.

F: Yeah, after that.

C: But my mum used to go pregnant to fetch the water. On one occasion, she even fell in with all her cans. [Caralampia takes the floor to add these details about her mother's story.]

F: I fell, I fell on my knees. I was pregnant. And I was careful not to fall flat on my face. Instead I got down on my knees, better to kneel down, I fell on my knees. I hurt my knees.

A: Well yes, on the stone, I imagine.

F: Yes, because it was pure stone.

A: And the water fell.

H. The water all poured down.

C: And my grandfather, my father's father, told her that she wasn't going to fetch water. And he sent my aunts.

F: He says, "Facunda is not going to bring water at all. Now you're here. Because if she didn't fall well. And she would have fallen and lost that child". So they didn't let me go and fetch water

A: Well yes, because I was already pregnant.

F: Yes

A: And after your children were born, you kept going to fetch water?

F: Yes, we kept fetching water. Until they put in the taps, but it took a long time. First they put in these long water tanks. But there we had to get up early to get water. Because each of us got four cans of water. And if we got up early, we got our share. And if we didn't, we didn't get it.

A: Four cans, you said?

F: Four cans. For each family, four cans.

A: And in this case it was the family you say, your in-laws, I imagine, your sisters-in-law...

F: My in-laws, my sisters-in-law. We were all together.

A: And you had to get up early for them to catch up?

F: Early. At five o'clock, at five o'clock at the latest. And some of them even formed their bottles as early as four o'clock. Yes, because the water was running out, and there wasn't any more.

A: And did you have to take turns or was it up to each one as they arrived?

F: As we were arriving, we formed up.

A: And then the water trucks would come to the houses?

F: Yes, the water trucks would come and we would form up to get water. They would fill our bottles. They would give us four bottles from each water truck. And with that we had to wash, and for the kitchen. For everything.

A: For drinking too?

F: For drinking, yes. They gave us water, clean water to drink. They didn't give us, for example, four cans of the same water. No. They gave us separately what we were going to use in the kitchen. Yes. We suffered, we suffered here.

A: Those were difficult years in terms of water.

F: Yes, very difficult, yes.

A: And you, Caralampia, do you remember a bit about... well, you knew here, you grew up here?

C: Yes.

A: Do you remember from those early years what the situation was like, associated with water?

Caralampia: I remember there were taps outside certain houses. Here in front, in Doña L's house, next to the theatre, there was a tap there. But that one had almost no water. And down here, before you get to the corner of the street towards the school, there was another tap. And my mum and dad used to get us up early to go and queue to fill our bottles. We would wait in line, and when the water was poured very early, around six o'clock in the morning, we would start to fill them. All the children would go around carrying water to the houses.

Facunda: Yes, also here in front, with Doña F there was also a tap there.

C: And we would form the bottles and bring them back with water and as many times as we could turn around. But we were little, I think we were about six years old, weren't we, mum? [asks Facunda].

F: Little kids.

C: We were very small, we were out there carrying water. And then later, I think we were about nine, ten years old, there was a very nice lady, who had a tap inside her house and she always had water because her tap was very low. Her house on the outside is level, towards the outside, but towards the inside, where her first house was, as they used to build as God gave them to understand, it was very low, like in a hole or in the famous cracks. So, she always had water there and then she would give us water. But when someone saw that we were already drawing water from her house, everyone wanted it. And she would scold her, her mother-in-law, right, mum? And her sisters-in-law would scold her because she gave us water. I mean, she gave us water because she got on very well with my mum. And she would give us the water. But once the neighbours saw that she had already given us water, they all wanted it. And then the mother-in-law would get angry and scold her. Right mommy?

F: Yes

C: But that's how it was for us too. But it was only here in the middle of the street. And the streets, even though they weren't paved, at least they weren't so uneven, they were already doing faena (community work). They were flatter. We didn't have what we had before. I'm 45 years old, I'm going to be 46. The neighbourhood is 51 years old. So by the time it was my turn, I think the neighbourhood was already 12 or 13 years old, more or less. So, it wasn't so much like that. My aunts were involved

A: So it wasn't until the other neighbourhood that they had to bring the water.

C: Yes, no, she [Facunda] went very far. Or my aunts, when they were sent. She [Facunda] and my grandfather were the ones who carried the water.

F: We carried the water.

A: And it was every day to carry water?

F: Every day.

C: Every day, in the early mornings.

A: And then the pipes came in, I imagine, to the houses.

C: When the pipes arrived, it was thanks to the organisation of the people.

There were always leaders. Here, one of the people who was the strongest leader in the centre of Santo Domingo was the teacher at the little school. And the women supported him a lot.

A: The teacher at the popular community centre?

C: Him. So that's how they got roads, electricity, water, drainage, many services. There are many people who don't have a very good opinion of him and there are many people who still greet him and respect him. Well, there are pros and cons, right? But within all that, there were many benefits. And among them, water, water intakes. Before, we had water intakes where, although we didn't get water every day, at least they didn't leave us without water for months, as happened recently.

When Toledo arrived in the Coyoacán delegation, he manipulated the vote with the delivery of water. Then, they cut off our water for months. I mean, seriously, for months. And if you phoned the delegation, they gave you a folio. But when you went to see that four or five days went by and the water truck didn't arrive, you went to see, and the folios no longer existed. In other words, it wasn't true about the folios.

So, you started to see them as operators of their cartel in Toledo, that here on the block there is a family that deals with them. If you gave them identification and promised to give them your vote, to support them in what they were doing and everything, they would send you the water truck for minutes, five minutes, or three minutes. And the water truck that arrived would bring a banner or a sign saying that it was Mauricio Toledo's support.

So, it didn't reach us because that man, even before he was a delegate, had beaten my brother. Toledo was proselytising outside of election season. My brother is a technician, he repairs washing machines and refrigerators. My brother had gone to Los Reyes Coyoacán, which is a very small neighbourhood, with very small streets. So he delivered a washing machine and had to take a refrigerator to be delivered. When he left the house where he put the washing machine, they had already closed the street. They were getting ready to hold the rally, it was in December and it wasn't election time yet, it was around January, February, more or less, the official campaign.

So, he went out and he says that there was a van half a metre away that wouldn't let him pass. And he said to one of their people, "hey, give me a chance to go around your truck, I'm going out because I'm working". And he said, "no, stay at the rally, we're going to start". And my brother said "I can't, I have a schedule to deliver my work". And they told him "no, well no, kid, until the rally is over, here is the next delegate and do with him as you like". So my brother says that it was easy for him to go and tell him, Toledo, because they were referring to him and everything. He said to him, "hey, I'm here saying things in a good way, I need to go out, give me a break". And he said, "no, get out of my way" and he pushed him away. And then my brother got annoyed and said, "let's see, I'm working and not because you come to ask for a vote, you can move, it's half a metre, I don't know what, there's a chance, just give me a chance to get out, please". And then Toledo told him, "I already told you no, kid", in a loud voice and so on. And he gave him a blow and then they all came at him. And they hit him, his chalanes, and another technician who was with him. And my brother was beaten up for a long time, wasn't he? [to Facunda, who nods]. With a stroke and everything. So, with that experience, obviously we didn't vote for him, nothing. Never in our lives, ever, did we have anything to do with him, not before, not after, not during his government…

A: Because he still held power with the next delegate.

C: With Maldonado and with this Negrete. And he still has it because Giovanni Gutiérrez, the current delegate, is his compadre. When Toledo arrived, he handed out school supplies in the primary schools and bought the Gutiérrez stationery shops from him. And the Gutiérrez stationer's is owned by Giovanni Gutiérrez.

A: So Toledo was the one who started to close the valve?

C: He was. Closing valves and in exchange for your voter's credentials and your vote, by word of mouth, and then with a photo. In exchange he was going to send you the water trucks.

A: And you, how did you deal with those months when the water didn't arrive?

C: My dad has a sister who lives in the lower part of Santo Domingo, more or less on the side of the road that continues from the popular community centre, as if it were behind that place. She had never lacked water until last year, she had never lacked water. So my husband and my brother have always had a pick-up truck and we would go there to fill up water jugs. And for washing or bathing we would go to her house, she would give us the water for free. On one occasion, my husband's parents also live next door, and they also sometimes let us fill water jugs. But we almost always went with my aunt. That's how we did it.

Or buy the water jugs. That used to happen a lot because water purification companies started to emerge. And that's where we used to go. Because it was much more expensive in the shop. A bottle of Bonafont water costs more than 50 pesos, I think, a 20-litre bottle.

A: Yes, and at the water purifier, well, the one I go to, 25 pesos a bottle.

C: So that's where we started to get water to drink. Water for food there with my aunt from the taps. And as I said, for washing and everything, I would take my mum's clothes, my sister-in-law would go with her or her mum, because we couldn't afford to pay for a laundry service and that wasn't enough, to be honest.

A: And it was months, years, how long did that problem last?

C: Months. All the time these people were in the delegation. Mainly when Toledo was there, it was more difficult. When Maldonado was there was a shortage of water, but not so marked. The same with Negrete. Now Giovanni was not given the opportunity because the Committee, that is, Waldo, Raúl, don Beni, doña Tita, Martina, are well-informed people. Oh, sometimes I say, how do they control themselves? [laughs] I mean, they know how to talk, they are informed. Because they are informed, that is, they are not fooled. They know how to pressure and they know how to organise people. And the people, well, obviously, because they see all that, they have followed them. And above all, they don't work with any political party. They work for and with the community and they are members of the community. And I think that's what works. If I were already from any political party, believe me, I wouldn't follow them. No, here we are all fed up with those politicians who come and promise you, tell you, for your vote. And the truth is that they come and it's enough for them. It's all about sticking their necks out, having their photo taken.

When we were talking about the well proposal, both Giovanni Gutiérrez and Carlos Castillo, and even some girls from the orange party, talked about the well. I mean, they had no idea, but they were trying to take credit for it. But no, not at all, that's purely the community's, the committee's. And the committee comes from another project of struggle, which was Aztecas 215.

This Quiero Casa real estate company, where they dump water from a spring. It is illogical and the authorities know it, both from the mayor's office of the previous delegation, the City of Mexico, Claudia Chamorro, Mancera, everyone knows it. How is it possible that we have a water shortage and that where there are springs, they throw the water into the drainage system? That's totally illogical, but that's how they keep the community subjugated.

A: So how did you get involved in the committee? How did you start going to the committee? I don't know if Facunda can tell me how it was that you started going to this group in defence of water? How did you start to get involved or go to the meetings?

F: The meetings were held here in front, in the street, not inside. So I would go, I would listen and all that. That's how I started.

A: How did you find out about the meetings? Did anyone tell you or did you see them?

F: I saw them. I saw them coming there from time to time and meeting. And I got curious and I said to my husband, "I'm going to see what it's all about". And I went, and that's what it was about, the water.

A: Were you alone or were you accompanied by neighbours, family?

F: I was alone. I knew them all.

A: Oh, you knew them.

F: Yes, I know everyone on the group. Waldo also knows me. So I went to join them and that's how we got together.

C: Yes, when we went to work, a neighbour would pass by at night. Doña E, mami [tells Facunda about this detail].

F: Aha

C: Doña E would pass by and she'd knock on the door of Doña L, my mum, Doña B and Doña R. We are the three lots in a row and Doña L is across the street. And she would tell them, "tomorrow at 7 in the morning we're going to leave because we're going to close such and such a street or such an avenue because they won't send us water". And when I was going to work, my mother was already together with the ladies who were leaving. [asks Facunda] Right mommy?

A: They were already ready.

F: Yes

A: Then the neighbours started going to meetings too, I guess. They all went.

F: Yes, we all went.

C: Yes, they went in the mornings to close avenues, in the afternoons to an assembly at the church of Colores. Right, mami?

F: Yes, that's where we went.

C: There was a lady who was a tailoring teacher at the community centre. She was also in Azteca 215 and she was also in the defence of water until the pandemic. During the pandemic, many older women left and some younger members of the family went, in some cases, and in others they didn't continue.

A: Yes, with the pandemic I guess everything changed, didn't it? They had to do the virtual meetings or they couldn't go to the meetings anymore?

C: When it was possible to have meetings because it was necessary, they had committees. They would ask "Let's see, who can do it? We're going to go to the mayor's office on such and such a day, at such and such a time. Who's going to join us? Then people would sign up, there was always someone to raise their hand. But the main ones are always those who organise and those who speak. Because the rest of us would go and ruin it instead of supporting them, I think, in a way [laughs]. But they are always the main ones. Waldo, Raúl, don Beni, doña Tita, doña Martina. And the rest of us support them, accompany them and everything. So that in some way they don't feel alone and also because we know that it is a benefit for everyone.

In other words, if the ones from here don't go, the water is going to reach them anyway because we are going. If the people from across the street don't go either, it's the same thing. So, this...

F: They called us crazy.

C: Those on the other side?

F: Yes, they branded us as crazy.

C: So one of the things I saw, and that's why when there was the pandemic and my mum couldn't do it any more, I did it, or when it was virtual or the meetings that were very necessary or to go to support or so on, well, my mum didn't go out any more. So I would go and do it. Because, can you believe it? If they didn't send us water for two weeks, my mother would tell Waldo, and that day SACMEX would send us water. But that was the work of the people on the committee. So, when I saw that there was support for us, I said "well yes, why shouldn't we support them? It's a benefit for everyone." And that's why both my sister-in-law and I got involved.

A: You took the initiative, so to speak.

C: Yes, I already knew Waldo from the community centre, because he used to go there. Occasionally, not a lot. And when we found out about Aztecas 215, the community centre lent them speakers, chairs and a stand. Sometimes people who also belonged to the community centre would go, but they went to the meetings on a voluntary and personal basis. I went to about three meetings. I didn't really get involved much because I was studying and my children were young.

So I couldn't. But we always knew about it.

But we always knew about it and we supported it. We found out when they evicted them, that they took everything away from them. They were very sad because it wasn't even their things that they lost. But somehow, people understood and told them that there is no problem. They were there supporting them and everything. And fortunately there were people, scientists from UNAM, who supported them. That is, because there are people who do have a conscience. And they supported them, they did the studies on the water and they protested.

And the fact that the people who are in defence of the towns and neighbourhoods are protesting saying that this water, if treated, can be drinkable and that it is spring water, is not because they want to say so. It is because there are already studies by people who know how to do their job. From people who are dedicated to this and who are endorsed by the university. Claudia Sheinbaum herself acknowledged this when she came to government. But afterwards, I don't know if she forgot or what happened there. Because she closed it for 15 days or a month, I don't remember how long. And then it opened again and was even sold. And those buildings were auctioned off. But they have humidity because of the spring.

A: Yes, well, the water was still running there. I remember seeing the videos that were uploaded on Facebook showing that the water was still running there in the drain. And Facunda, how did you meet Waldo?

F: At the water meetings.

A: But then it was something that you didn't know each other that well before. I imagine they've got to know each other more now....

F: Now, yes.

A: And you tell me that there are people from this street who don't go to the meetings.

C: From here, from where we are, further down, nobody. They don't want to go, they're not interested. But when they needed a water truck they came to see me. And I would tell them "well, I ask you to join the committee and participate and bring them their water, but go because you have to give something, you have to support them". And they weren't interested. And also, when people from the mayor's office came to manipulate the valves and cut off our water, my neighbours would tell me, and I would quickly tell Waldo and they would go and see what happened. So all that communication is what has helped us to put pressure on them as well. Because they know that we are not going blindly, or that we are not just making a fuss for the sake of making a fuss, as they might see it. It is simply that we are organised. I think that if the well was achieved it is because there was organisation and there was perseverance and the support of the people, in other words solidarity. All of that is basic.

Because even the people, the neighbours of the street where the well is located did not agree. It took a lot of work and there was a lot of friction in the meetings with them. But finally even they were convinced that it was in their interest. As there is a tap there, there was a man who didn't pay for the water, so they cut it off and from there he connected his hose. And he obviously didn't agree with the idea of digging a well because they were going to take away his tap and how would the water reach him.

However, the committee negotiated, and the truth is that I don't really remember if they remitted the payment or if there was an agreement so that he could pay and have his water connection. But he was very comfortable, at everyone's expense, he got his hose.

A: And the tap is still there, I imagine.

C: It's still there, they just moved it a little bit so they could build the well. We're very happy because it's been done. And what do you think? Since they started it up, we get water every night, right mommy?

F: Yes

C: We haven't lacked any. Before they only sent us water on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. And my sister-in-law lives here with her children, my mum and me. And we had to take turns with the washing machine, because we recycle the water from the washing machine. We have our bottles there for the bathroom, for mopping, for washing the corridors, for washing the street. Sometimes when we really needed it, we even used that water to water the plants. There was nothing else to do. And now, even though we get water every day, we continue to recycle. That's where we have our bottles. First, so we don't waste so much water. That way we don't empty the cistern. Secondly, we try not to use the washing machine too much. I mean, apart from the electricity, the soap, whatever you want, it's also for the water. And that water continues to be recycled in the same way. For washing toilets, for mopping, for scrubbing outside. It is still recycled.

A: It's become a habit, hasn't it?

C: And also for the children to do it. They have to learn it that way. In my case, we don't bathe with a shower, but with a bucket. We got used to it over time and I told them "forget about the shower". Because a lot of water is wasted. So, my children and my husband and I, definitely with a little bucket like that, we taught ourselves and so on. That's what we keep on bathing with so we don't waste water in the shower.

I mean, with all this talk about water running out in the future, we are going to do our part. Try to take care of it as much as possible.

A: Yes, with the issue of water, that comes into play a lot, doesn't it? The environmental issue is also a bit of an issue. So that's something that's important to you too, I imagine.

C: Yes, of course. Here, if you look at Santo Domingo, in the photos from before, you see trees, pirules, eucalyptus. We had a eucalyptus tree outside here. Now when you go out and walk around, you'll see it. And this street, really, A, this street is the only street that, if it has three or four trees, that's a lot of trees. That's a lot. I mean, I don't know why people don't give them the importance they have. The tree gives us oxygen, it gives us cooling shade. Now that the sun is super burning, inclement, you stand in the shade of a tree, no matter how small it is, and it's the coolness of life. And here we don't have that. We had a tree outside here and the neighbours took out their construction at the level of the pavement and we didn't notice, they cut the root and poured oil on it and dried it out.

A: The tree?

C: The tree. So my dad put a pine tree there and we had a pine tree.

They sold in the street market and every time they arrived they would put their truck there and hit it with the door of the truck behind them. And the same on the way back. And poor little pine tree. One day my dad got a knock and they told him, "the lady over there has just gone inside, but look, there's smoke coming out of your pine tree, she poured hot water on it". What can you do with people like that? They were arguments, and you'd say something to someone and they'd all come out, arguments, and we said " no more".

And then we were just in the neighbourhood improvement project in the last improvement that came in on this street. The neighbourhood improvement programme is a Mexico City government programme, and in the popular community centre, well, I was managing it in the administration committee from 2011 until 2020, which was the last time they did it. And one of those times we put lighting and pavements here. So we took advantage of that and I asked the architect if we could put in an outdoor planter. And we didn't put in a tree because we don't want them to mistreat it again. Because if the leaves or the twigs fall off, you don't know, they claim it's your rubbish. They would throw it. And they would come and put it on our doorstep because it was the tree's rubbish, the leaves. In other words, it's like not being aware of the environment, of nature.

[A boy passes by, apparently a teenager, who is a relative, and says goodbye to both of them. Probably a nephew of Caralampia].

A: So the relationship with some of the neighbours is not so good?

C: No, no, but that's just it, isn't it? The awareness of the environment. Or also, there's a lack of awareness of... there's a way of saying it, coexistence [convivencia], right? The community, well. I've lost the term just now. On one occasion my neighbour asked the Committee to send her a water truck. And Waldo sent it. The driver arrived, she put the hose in her cistern, and got in her house. And when she came out after a little while, the hose wasn't there. Other neighbours pulled the hose into their house so it left the water there. Waldo found out about it and scolded them. He was not rude, but he told them “don’t do that”.

A: So are these neighbours who are not in the Committee?

C: They were in the group, but they didn't go to the meetings. Only when they needed water.

Waldo has never in his life been rude or derogatory. But he did find out. Even when the engineer came to see the water intake, they brought him, the people from the Committee, he came with Doña Tita, Don Beni, Waldo, they came here in front with Doña L because the water was coming to all of us and not to her. So they came and sent people and they realised that she had problems with her water supply. So on that occasion the lady said to him, "hey Waldo, you sent me the water truck and the neighbours took it to that house". So he told them, "no, don't do that. I mean, if we are supporting each other, it's no problem to send them, right? But don't do that."

And in terms of the environment, well, also the neighbours who pass by eating, walking, they throw rubbish and the rubbish comes and goes, comes and goes. I mean, that's bad because it clogs the drains, it makes the street look ugly, it looks dirty, etc. But that's a question of education. In other words, all these things are a matter of education.

A: But there are other neighbours with whom you were telling me a little while ago that have even supported each other with the water truck, that is, there has been a better coexistence [convivencia], a better relationship.

C: The water truck, and when we have water we share the water. Yes.

A: Is that with other neighbours here in the street? The ones who go together?

C: Yes.

Yes, Mrs. B, then she would come with her jug and say "Do you have water?" And I would say "yes". And she would say "please give me some". And they would say "Do you have any water? Because I don't have enough..." And we say "yes". Because curiously, first it fills up here, then here, then here, then here, then here, like this, up the hill [referring to the different houses and their locations on the street]. And on one occasion, on a tour we did looking at the valves, a person from the mayor's office explained to me that the well is from up here and that when they open the tap and bring the water, first it runs down to the bottom and then it fills up. Then it goes down and comes back up again, it comes from the bottom to the top filling up, and that's how the water reaches the houses. So yes, first it comes like this. So the water always reached us before it reached her, because she is higher up. Then she would see that it was coming down on us and she would say "give it to me". And we would give it to her. We already knew that it was going to keep coming down on us for at least three days.

But that was an achievement of the committee. Because they negotiated the tandeo. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and part of Thursday it would fall on the high zone. And Friday, Saturday, Sunday and part of Monday it falls in the central zone.

And in the lower zone they have never suffered from water. Until just last year, I don't know what happened. It coincided with the beginning of the drilling of the well and the water was cut off. They were very angry and were organising themselves against the well. And we think it was political too. But they were organising against the well because they were saying "what a coincidence that they are starting to drill for the well and they are taking away our water". And they had never lacked water. I'll even tell you that we used to go there to wash with my aunt. So, to stop that, Waldo and I coordinated with a neighbour from the streets below us, so that they would send water trucks.

And SACMEX sent water trucks and we went from house to house delivering water trucks. And they didn't leave three minutes like the mayor's office. In other words, they filled their cisterns. And they went around for two days, going up and down, and up and down, and water trucks arrived every hour. It was very exhaustive. And the lady we coordinated with, because she was the one who came to talk, well, she was supporting a political party. So I had to stick to her so that she wouldn't say that the water had been sent from that party. So, I said, "Let's see, no, the water truck was sent by the committee, it was negotiated with the committee. SACMEX sent it". To clarify that it wasn't them. Because they are very clever. And she said to me, "no, go and rest, don't worry", and I said "no, don't worry" [laughs]. I didn't even come, I didn't even come to feed my family. I was coming home late at night. It was 10 o'clock at night and we were still handing out water trucks. And I'm not going to allow that if the committee is negotiating, and if they are giving the committee a bad name, that they should now use that to claim things for themselves. Precisely because we weren't interested in the other neighbours being against the well.

A: And then, well, the lack of water has given way to this contact, solidarity between neighbours.

C: Yes

A: To share water and ask for water trucks, I imagine, that kind of activity.

C: Yes

A: Are there any other activities where you have seen this solidarity between neighbours about water?

C: Well, I can tell you that since the neighbourhood began, with organisation, things have been achieved. Because as I said, nobody here has given anything away. That is to say, the politicians came to promise, but they never returned. So, through demonstrations and sit-ins, streets were built, electricity, drainage and water connections were achieved.

And now with the neighbourhood improvement projects that I am telling you about, they are projects. The rules of operation are published in the gazette and any neighbour can submit a project and compete. If it is selected, then, depending on the category it falls into, it is done. We always included urban image projects. Because people came here and built because what they needed was a place to live. So the constructions are built as they can. There is no structure, no plan, no design. The houses that you can see that are beautiful, new, spacious and with light, are because they were thrown away and rebuilt by INVI or by their own resources. But then, if inside they lack what to do, we flattened and painted them outside. We would put street lights and pavements. But for this to be approved, we had to hold assemblies in which the neighbours had to participate and vote if they wanted the project. But the project had already been put together.

The first project came with guys from UAM. They came with the architect, who was the technical advisor and she was their teacher. And they did the mapping, measurements and everything about the streets. Plans of how it was and how it could look. Colour proposals and everything. And all that was presented to the neighbours and they voted. And there, administration, supervision and social development committees were elected. The social development people would bring in events or the kids who might have a bar to graffiti. And because at that time it was self-administration, we didn't bring in companies. We gave work to the neighbours themselves. So the neighbours would flatten, the neighbours would paint, and the prices that were published in the Gazette were the same. And although they charged more, they didn't mind lowering their price because they took over the whole street.

A: So you've been involved a lot in the community, with the neighbours.

C: Yes.

A: And in the struggle for the defence of water, being neighbours, do you think that has given you some advantage, some strength?

C: Of course.

A: In what sense?

C: Yes, first of all, because we have communication. And also because we all know how the neighbourhood grew, how it was formed, how it was built and how it has moved forward. Maybe we and those who are coming, our children, have not had the chance to see that part of how it used to be made of stone, how they had to carry water, that there was no electricity, that there were animals, whatever you want. But we do know about that work because in my case, my grandmother told us about it, my mother told us about it, my grandfather told us about it. So we know all that work and that's why we value it. Do you know what I mean?

Besides the fact that we are talking about the biggest invasion in Latin America. And getting here cost them a lot of work. Because they had to bring the wood, the plastic, the sheeting. And then the scraping, the men arriving tired from working and working. Pregnant women looking after children, and working. It all cost a lot of money. And as we know that work, many of us, if we get the easy part [laughter] we do it. Because it's really easy, you don't have to go out and do faena (community work). You go and demonstrate if they don't listen to you, or you go and meet. How long have we been in the assemblies? At most an hour and a half, and what's an hour and a half a week? It's nothing. So that you have water all week, or so that you have water at the weekend and you can dose it. So that you have water all week and you have your basic services. The basics.

When we had the pandemic, if everything was about cleanliness, what did you do? How did you clean? How did you wash your hands? You had to wash your hands for everything. For everything, as we didn't know what it was, we were afraid, and everything, you wiped, and you wiped with disinfectant. And you needed water, and they took it away from us. At that time they took it away from us. And what do you think? When Waldo called for a sit-in, who do you think volunteered? Just old people. The least suitable people to be out on the street. And there they went, and there they stood up. And they managed to get them to open the valves again and send us the water. In the pandemic. And that's how it was. And meetings, and let's go to the mayor's office, and meetings, and let's go to the mayor's office, and so on.

A: Why do more older adults participate?

C: Because of what I'm telling you, they know about the work. If you don't instil that in the kids, it's already lost. Here, for example, in the popular community centre, and now in the committee, we do this kind of reminder of history, don't we? For example, when it's the first of September, events are held. In the committee there have been photographic exhibitions, stories.

There is a girl called Fernanda, Waldo's partner. She writes, and she writes very beautifully. And she asks the members of the committee to write about their experience in Santo Domingo, about the water. And from all that, she takes parts of it and uploads it, she exposes it, we talk about it. And then it's a part of reminding the younger ones.

And here in the community centre we have mañanitas (birthday celebrations), we have get-togethers, there is a group of elderly women. And there are dances, meals, exhibitions, cultural events. And so the idea is that the new generations, the youngsters, are reminded of how this neighbourhood came about and that everything takes work. That it's not just that they were born and, oh, they have electricity, they have water, how cool! It all cost a lot. And we have to look after it, because we need to be aware of the need to look after water.

A: And in addition to memory, you mention communication between neighbours as an advantage or strength.

C: That's right. As I told you. A neighbour would come and knock on my mum’s door, and they would leave together for the protest. Also, when the pandemic broke out and everything was online, I had to tell my neighbours what happened in our meetings because they could not go because they’re older and they don’t use WhatsApp. And then on some occasions, I asked for a pipa using the chat for my next-door neighbour.

And then I had told Waldo in a personal message that the lady doesn't have WhatsApp, but she needs a water truck. She was going to ask for a water truck for me and a water truck for her. He told me "ah, well, yes, take out your SUAC number". I took out both of them. And then as we are used to, there is a form to order the water truck, and I send it double. And then someone answers me, "this person is asking for two water trucks for different addresses". And then I had to explain why. And the person who said it said "oh, sorry, I didn't know". But no, it was my mistake, because I only told Waldo in person, instead of saying it. And so several times I asked him for a water truck. And obviously, we have to let each other when the pipa comes, because we have to go out and remove things or move cars, so they can park and leave the water, because if not, they can't.

A: Yes, and that communication of knowing when someone is short of water.

C: No, well, when it was about the lady, about the hose, she didn't say it, the neighbours said it, because they were indignant. They said "How is it possible that she asks for it and the others just take it away?" Even the engineer asked for the name of the person, of the driver who was bringing the water truck. Because how is that possible?

A: And you, Facunda, had you ever been in a group like this before, like a group of neighbours, from here, of settlers, doing activities? Had you ever participated in groups like this before?

F: Yes, I've always been in groups like that.

A: And participating in this kind of group, like the water group, what do you think it has meant? Has it been a positive thing, a good experience for you?

F: Good.

A: For what reasons, what is the good thing that these groups give you?

F: Because we could have water, mainly. And it was achieved.

A: And the water issue, you say it was a lot of suffering before, wasn't it?

F: Uh-huh.

A: And now you feel a bit more satisfaction from the fact that you now have it?

F: Yes, it feels good. Yes, because we spent a lot of time out there.

A: Yes, it was very constant.

F: Yes.

A: And this Water Defence Committee, is that also a positive thing? Do you have any gratitude, admiration for the group?

F: Yes, we all supported each other. We were grateful that they listened to us. Although we struggled a lot. Yes, we struggled a lot. Sometimes they didn't want to receive us, we went and they didn't want to receive us.

A: So you had to insist.

F: We had to insist, yes.

A: And with the well too, I imagine you were there at the beginning.

F: Also, yes. That's how it was.

A: And it's a good thing that now, now that the well is there, the water has arrived.

F: Aha. Now we are fine.

A: And what do you hope for the future of the committee and the neighbourhood? What would you like for the new generations?

F: Well, that there will be no lack of water, mainly. Because it is a vital liquid that should not be lacking. For many reasons.

A: It is needed for everything.

F: For everything, yes. That's what we want, that there should be water.

A: Do you, Caralampia, have any expectations for the future, for the group and also for Santo Domingo?

C: As a teacher, our objective is to contribute to the development of the children, so that they are autonomous, proactive, participative and that they can live together well, that they know how to work as a team. Precisely so that when they become adults, they can fit into society. Imagine if we can manage to keep the Water Defence Committee going. And just like my mother, who is no longer there because she is now old, many people who died in the pandemic, either because of the COVID or because of chronic degenerative diseases, or whatever, they didn't continue but they were fighting. And many of the children of these women are still alive. So that would be very good, to have an organised community. To be participative in everything. Both for improvements and for coexistence, as well as for future proposals, work.

Right now, for example, they were working on the mega-project for the Azteca Stadium, which they were quickly authorised, as with the Mítikah Tower, they were quickly authorised to dig wells and build. Well, maybe it is private land, maybe the investment is going to be private and everything, but it does have an impact on the community. There will be a good impact because of the jobs, but there will also be a lot of impact on the water, on the influx of people, on crime, there will be.

So at some point we supported the committees that exist in Santa Ursula so that it would not be built. I don't know right now if we will continue to support them, but it depends on what our committee coordinators tell us. But I think that this part is important, if we participate, and above all if we are informed and have arguments and bases, we can achieve a lot of things. For the good and for the future and to sustain ourselves.

A: Do you think that the water issue is a matter of justice?

C: Oh yes, of course. Yes, of course, why is it that in areas that are of high or middle social levels there is water? And in areas like ours, the working class, they take it away from us. When we are in the rocky area (pedregal), and the rocky area is very rich in water, they take it away from us and take it away from us. They take it from us and charge us for it. That is, they don't send it to us and they charge us for it. Because if we have anything from my dad, it's not to owe and not to go overboard. Or not to wait for the day that says the last day to pay, because he has always taught us that.

A: Well yes, because the bill keeps coming.

C: Oh, right. We don't pay water, electricity or telephone bills, because he has always taught us that. So, we pay for water and we don't get it, and that's obviously unfair. And there are places where they forgive the water and it continues to arrive and they never lack water. In other words, there are areas where there will never be a lack of water. Why? Because there are those privileges.

A: Well, thank you very much for the time of the interview. Thank you for sharing with me your memories, your stories. I don't know if there is anything else you would like to add, something like a conclusion, an idea you would like to close with. What has this struggle meant to you, Facunda?

F: I say that the meaning is that thank God they sent it to us, we have it. We did it, well, we did it.

A: Thank you, Caralampia, something you would also like to close with?

C: Well, I would like to thank the people who are on the committee, our coordinators, our representatives, Waldo, Raúl, Don Beni, Doña Tita. We've known Doña Tita all our lives, right mami?

F: All her life

C: Because she lived, she rented in the house of one of my uncles and she worked for a while in the kitchen of the popular community centre. And Doña Martina, and also Doña Sandra who was there at the beginning of the committee. Now I don't know if it's because of work or she's ill, I haven't seen her. But mainly to them who have always been there, as I said, informed. Nobody fools them.

And to the other members of the committee, like us who are behind them, we would like to thank them all and also acknowledge their perseverance and support, their solidarity. Because thanks to that, most of us now have water in our homes on a daily basis. The time that the well has been in operation is the time that we have not asked for a single water truck. We haven't asked for a water truck at all. Because we all have water. There are some people who suddenly say, "oh, they cut off our water for two days". That's all. But they have water. And because we all got used to recycling it and dosing it without problems. We can keep it for two days without any problem.

A: Well, thank you very much again, for sharing this with me, for talking for an hour this afternoon.

C: Thanks to you A.