**Transcription of Interview with Mariana**

Place: Popular community centre

Date and time: December 13, 2022, starting at 9:00 hrs.

Duration: 41:55

Additional observation notes: I arrive at the popular community centre at 9:10, and Mariana is already waiting for me. We are on the first floor of the popular community centre, not on the terrace. There are not many people at this hour, so there is no problem. She did not want to fill in a diary.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Mariana [M]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: Thank you for granting me this interview. Can we start with your name.

M: My name is Mariana.

A: Thank you very much, can you tell me some general information about yourself?

M: I am 57 years old. I am a government worker, a bureaucrat. I didn't finish high school, I have a incomplete secondary education. We have a little house that my parents left us as an inheritance, which they started here in Santo Domingo when there was no water, no electricity, no drainage. In other words, they worked from scratch here. In order to be able to have this, there were many sacrifices, many deaths of people who were dedicated to having a little piece of land here in the neighbourhood of Santo Domingo. Here we suffered above all in terms of drainage and electricity. The electricity in the community was pulled from other parts of the community in order to have the service here. The same goes for water. We had to carry it to the other neighbourhood called Ajusco, where there was a pump. We used to carry it on the cobblestones and everything, in cans. And we used to put a hook and a rope on sticks called a water holder. We put it on our shoulders and from there we carried the water. When the neighbourhood was formed here, we needed water.

Because here, it was a rocky area. It was all cardboard houses. I arrived here when I was 6 years old, I was already grown up. And then I realised what life is like when you start a neighbourhood. Over the years we managed to get water, we managed to get drainage. Because we fought for it. Now it was our right and we fought for it. The elders were the ones who fought, but not us.

Now that my mum has passed away, and my dad has passed away, we realised what the situation was like. For example, after fighting for so long for the liquid, after having the rights to the electricity and everything, things have been happening that we don't like. For example, the electricity, which has been changed from before it was Luz y Fuerza and now it is CFE. And that's why we didn't sign a contract.

So now what has hurt us the most is that 17 years ago we didn't have the liquid. We got the water every two or three months. So I met the Water Defence Committee and Waldo through a cousin.

And I approached him, and through that struggle we began to see that I didn't have water and I joined them to go and fight at the water company, at SACMEX. We were going to demand it. There were meetings here, and I went to those meetings. And I had to come face to face with SACMEX and the mayor's office. Because I work in the government and I know how many things are handled. And I told them "it is not possible for them to tell us that they are going to send us water trucks when in reality that is not what we are looking for". We are looking for water to be sent to us through the pipe network. That we have the liquid, because it is our right to have it. Because they charge us for something that we are not using. So it was a fight, a struggle, until we got the water. If not daily, then once or twice a week, but we have water. After 17 years. But when I became a member of the water committee, that's how I fought for this.

In the same way, with the well, it happened that two or three people did not agree that it should be done. So we went to a meeting, and we confronted SACMEX. I raised my hand, because I paid 11,000 pesos, and the man did not pay for water, and he was demanding a right that I believe that if I am paying, I have more right to demand than the person who is not paying. So we told him right there and then. Because their whim was to change the well to a park. But if all the studies had already been done and they said that the well would go there, I think that the well should be done where it is. Well, that's my idea. And I said to SACMEX, when everyone spoke, I raised my hand and said, "Why shouldn't the well go there on a whim of two or three people? And in front of a thousand people who are saying that the well should be built, are they going to give the right to two or three people? So they thought about it, they talked to the people who were qualified to do that, I don't remember the name right now, and they said that the well would go there. And so the well was built. Fortunately, thank God, we are now going to have water. But there was a lot of struggle to get the well that is now going to be built. But we have struggled a lot to get water in this part of the neighbourhood.

A: In the central part of the neighbourhood, or what part do you mean?

M: The central part. It was 17 years that the water didn't come sometimes. Three or four months would go by, and we suffered because the water didn't arrive. SACMEX said that it was the network, that my pipe network was bad and that's why I couldn't get water. And I don't want them to come and tell me lies, because in the time of the pandemic, in 2020, we did have water. We did have water, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Rarely, but we did have water.

So I said to SACMEX: "You can't come and tell me that we don't have water, and that my network is bad. I do get water, so you can't say that. You are not managing things well here. And they would always tell us "we don't have water in the Cutzamala". And I told them "well, you can't tell me that either, because I go on social media and I see that the Cutzamala may also be suffering from drought when it rains, but when it rains it overflows. So you can't come and tell me something that I can see is not true. And all of this was also useful. I think I have been direct and political. Because it has helped us to demand. And that's what I say to Waldo, that here you have to demand, here you don't have to ask, because the authorities don't listen. Here we have to get our act together and demand our right to water.

A: You told me that this problem started about 17 years ago.

M: Of not having water, exactly.

A: And before that?

M: Before that we did have water. We had water from the network every day. But then SACMEX started making changes. They say they are going to change the network for improvements. That's a lie. That is, they have always taken away our water. By businesses, or by whatever they want, but we have always let them take our water. We ourselves have caused it by not defending the right to water. Because I have seen it. And I do stand up to them. The truth is that I am a person who will always tell it like it is. And I am not afraid of anything, I am not afraid of reprisals or anything else. Because I have the right to do so. It is a right that I have.

A: And before you joined the Committee, how did you manage when there was a water shortage?

M: When the water started to run out, thank God we always had a mother who, because we suffered from water shortages at the beginning, she was very careful with water. Very water-saving. And she taught us to save water. Because before, when there was no water, she used a little bucket to bathe us. She used that same bucket to sweep, because as she didn't have a concrete floor, she poured water in it, sprayed her house, and swept with that same water. So one little bucket was enough for many things. Today I wash dishes with a tray, one of those trays that hold water. And I wash enough dishes that everyone is surprised.

I see that there are people who make me feel sorry for how they waste water. Because there are people who use water trucks, and water trucks, and water trucks, and water trucks, and water trucks. Thank God, since I joined the Committee, I haven't needed water trucks. We don't have a cistern, we have water tanks. We live there in my poor house [she does the math]... there are 7 families. And each one has a 1,100-litre drum. So if they don't save, they run out of water. And when they use half of their water, I only use a quarter of it. And I wash dishes, and I wash the kitchen. I do all my chores, but with very little water. In other words, if I'm going to use it to wash dishes, I use the same water for other things. I mean, I try to save water, a lot. So I don't have that problem of asking for water trucks, until now. I've been with them for three years now, with the Committee. And I haven't asked them for a water truck yet.

A: How did it affect you, once you started to run out of water? Did you have to be even more careful?

M: I don't think so because we already had the experience from when we were little, that my mother taught us to save water. In other words, it didn't change the way I acted. Yes, maybe in terms of washing blankets and so on. We did have to save a little more water, and we washed every three months. It was no longer every fortnight or every eight days. It was to decide "either I wash blankets, or I use them for what they should be used for. Which is for everyday use: dishes, cooking, everyday things. So that's where we learned to save water. We also have a 12-kilo washing machine. And we used to wash clothes in that washing machine, take them out and put other clothes in it. We washed up to three washing machines with that little bit of water. And we would rinse it in a pot. And we would rinse and squeeze in the washing machine, because it's manual. So that has helped us to save water.

A: So you remember that your mother instilled in you the idea of saving water?

M: Yes, to save water

A: In your first years here in the neighbourhood, did you have to carry water or was it just your mother?

M: Yes, us too, when we were little we would take our water holder and bring our little buckets full of water. And we didn't drop a single drop. We learnt not to let a drop fall on the ground because it was vital, it was for life.

A: And now how did you get into the Committee? You told me that it was through a cousin, what was the whole process like?

M: One day I needed water, and we had already asked SACMEX for our water truck. And it had taken a while, and I said to my cousin, "Oh, they haven't been giving us water for two days now and I don't have any water". And she said to me: "cousin, there's a meeting in the back of the school. The man's name is Waldo, ask for him. Go to the meetings, they are held at five in the afternoon. So I went and talked to him, and he put me on his list. And he told me that the meetings were at five o'clock, and that they would tell me by phone when the meetings were taking place.

And sometimes, when there was, for example, the pandemic, they were virtual meetings. That's what I learnt from them: to have virtual meetings. So I went to the meeting, I told him I needed water trucks. And he said "yes, give me your name". And I gave him my name. He said "here you get a SUAC (citizen service) number, you send it to me and we'll send you the water truck". Fortunately there was no need to ask him for a water truck, because we had already asked SACMEX. Then SACMEX would send us the water truck and fill us up.

And from then on, very little water started to arrive. Because he said that the water was being sent like that. Before that I had March, April, May, and June. I hadn't had any water for four months. And I told him, "Look, we don't have any water anymore. Before this, during the pandemic, we did get water, but now we don't get water at all. And he said "don't worry, I'll ask for your water truck and we'll support you". And then it started again, when we started to ask the Mayor's Office and SACMEX for water, it started to come, even if it was just a trickle, but it did come. And that trickle filled a two-hundred-litre drum, another two-hundred-litre drum, and with that we had enough to carry on.

A: Yes, because you said you went 4 months without water?

M: Four months. Until we met this man and I started to fight with the Mayor's Office and I started to fight with SACMEX. It wasn't possible that we didn't have water when we did have water in the pandemic. In other words, we had water for a year every day. After 17 years we had water for a year, and we said "well, now it's back to normal, we do have water". I didn't know that Waldo was the one working on this side of the Committee, so that we would have water.

A: And those four months without water were in 2021 then?

M: Yes, from then on we had no water. We used to turn on the tap and there was no water. Now, fortunately, we do have water.

A: And before joining the Committee, did you know the people who were there?

M: No, because I used to ask the Mayor's Office or SACMEX to send us water.

A: Had you had to ask for many water trucks before?

M: No, we don't use a lot of water. We are about saving water. So I'm surprised when they send the group that wants water. And that's when we had water for a day or two, and we had to save water. I don't have a cistern and I am surprised that people don't have a cistern but they ask and ask and ask for water. They overdo the cleaning.

A: So your cousin was also in the group?

M: Yes, it's just one plot of land, but my dad sold half of it. They live higher up, because it's uphill. It's on Tetl, it's uphill. So I get the water and then she doesn't get it. Because there is no pressure. So I can have water and she can't have water. But I have also learned to save water because it is necessary to save water.

A: And what has your experience of being in the group been like?

M: It has been very good. Knowing the right people to go and see and talk to so that we can have water is very good. Expressing one's right to have water in the network. I have met the right people to be able to stand out, so that we can have the liquid. And the important thing here is to demand the right to water. Because we have the right.

A: Is the right to water important to you?

M: Of course it is, because without water we wouldn't live. It is something very important. And defending it is equally important, so that companies don't appropriate the water that we have. However, many of us have let them do that to us. But you can't take on the world, not just one person. We would all be needed to defend what is rightfully ours.

A: In this sense, has it helped to organise yourselves as neighbours to defend this right?

M: Yes, that is a very important part of the Committee. It has helped us to defend the right to water.

A: What have been the Committee's most important achievements for you?

M: The most important achievements of the Committee have been that, for example, the Mayor's Office has been asked for water in the network, because before they were satisfied with sending water trucks. But I am one of the people who is persistent, who asks for the things I demand because I have the right to do so. And I said to the Mayor's Office, "How is it possible that you have a water operation and you can't send us the water through the network?" I think this is something very important. So, by demanding and asking, we have managed to get the water through the network.

A: Has it been normalised?

M: Well, not normalised, because in order to normalise it, you have to be behind those in power, you have to demand it from them. Because if it were up to them, they wouldn't send water for us. They send it for their rights, for their goods, to make their pockets rich. For purely for companies. And we are not so important in their lives because we don't have the money to pay. But we can demand the right. That is what the Committee has helped us the most, to demand. In other words, it has helped us. And also to demand in SACMEX to get the well. In other words, the Committee has been able to demand that the water be in the network and that the well be built.

A: And it's not every day that it's in the network.

M: Not every day. But if we have it for one or two days, that's enough for me. For others maybe not, but for me it is. As long as I fill my drums and keep my drums full, that water lasts me eight days.

A: And that's been the result of pushing and demanding.

M: That's right, that's what it has been, demanding the right for us to have water because we pay.

A: Yes, because apart from that they continue to charge for water, I imagine?

M: Yes, and with threats that if you don't pay they put a block on you and you don't have water. You get water with less pressure. So it's a threat, and we have to go and pay even if we don't have it. And the truth is that I have gone to SACMEX to fight when I have gone to pay, and I tell them "I am paying for a liquid that I don't even have in the network, but well, if that's the way you think it should be". And I said: "Don't come to me and say that my network is bad because I know that I do get water. You can't come and tell me this" And they keep quiet, they don't argue with me anymore.

A: And did you have experience of participating in a neighbourhood group before?

M: Yes, I have experience, I am in an organisation because my rights were also violated with the electricity and I joined a committee. But we don't even talk about that Committee. The truth is that this committee doesn't really convince me like the one Mr. Waldo is on.

A: What do you like or like about the Water Defence Committee?

M: I like the fact that they don't force you to go to places, for example. The other group is politicised. And the water committee is not politicised. It's a right we have, and that's what I liked about working with Mr Waldo.

A: But you already had experience of going to the authorities to demand...

M: Oh yes, because in my job I belong to a union. So in the union we belong to we have fought for our rights. They have been ignored, but well, as far as we have been able to, we have also fought for them. So I have defended myself before the authorities. And I already have a career of many, many years.

A: You are not afraid of them...

M: I'm not afraid of them because it's a right you have. And they have taught me which articles of the law contain the rights that we have, and which articles we have to comply with our work based on them. Our rights and that. The obligations as well.

A: And the issue of water is often linked to the environment. Do you think that also has something to do with it in this case?

M: Of course it does. If we don't have water, there is no environment. Besides, the authorities have destroyed all that by creating their private companies and giving priority to other things. Like right now, what is happening now is that Claudia has just deceived the poor people of Santa Ursula that the megaproject is not going to happen. And according to her, she says it is going to go ahead.

So this government has done nonsense after nonsense, and that is the truth. We don't have a president as such. We have a dictator, because this man is a dictator. And this Ms. Sheinbaum is the same, she's coming for the same thing. And not to mention Mr. Ebrard who has also had many failures. Because we have been working as union members for many years, in fact, I am already retired but as I have a daughter in school I have to continue working. If I retire, I won't get paid for two years, so I won't have the money to support my daughter. These are things that the government has done that make you lose confidence in them.

And yes, the environment would be a good thing for us, because they have cut trees where they shouldn't cut them. And there is a lot of dirt and everything also because people don't have the liquid at hand. And that's why we are suffering now from the famous ozone, because of many companies that let it happen and allowed it. Because if at the beginning, many years ago, they hadn't allowed it, it wouldn't have happened. Just as it used to be that you went to get your egg and you took your basket, or for your bread and you took your breadbasket. In other words, I think we used to live much better and we were very well off. But these companies have put an end to everything. I mean, maybe even we as people who throw away bottles or throw this away, but the companies also have a lot to do with it. And they are the ones that are leaving us without water.

A: So the defence of water is also connected to that for you?

M: Of course it is, very much so.

A: And with the issue of linking up as neighbours, do you think that you have also had this aspect within the Committee or has it been something that you already had before? How has it been for you to come into contact with others?

M: I think that the fact that I have had experiences with my work or with the electricity committee and that I came into contact with Mr. Waldo has been a fundamental part of it. Where I create my own ideas and my own thoughts to say "this is where I come from". I am from the Committee and I am seeing that they are working for our rights. Mr Waldo is not working for himself, he is working for all of us. And I value that kind of thing. For me, what Mr. Waldo is doing is very valuable. Because he is wasting his time, spending a lot of time there, and nobody says to him: "how is your son? how is your wife? how are you doing?" In other words, he has done it without any interest whatsoever. He has helped people because he is a humanitarian. That's my point of view.

A: And apart from Waldo, have you met other people within the Committee?

M: Yes, Tita, Martina, Raúl, Beni. They are the ones within the Committee that they manage as representatives. If I talk to Waldo it's because it's with him that I've had most contact. And when my cousin told me, "go and look for Waldo", I went and looked for him. But here the group that they make is nice. They work for you. They take time away from their chores to pay attention to the community.

A: And are there other neighbours that you recognise as having joined the Committee? Is that part of it too?

M: Only when we have meetings. Because the truth is that I'm a very busy woman. I have to make food, I have to take the child to school. I go to work, so I don't sit still in one place. But yes, when I see people I do recognise them.

A: How do you manage to be at work and also go to the Committee?

M: I give myself time. For example, I go to work from 8:30 in the morning to 5 in the afternoon. When it's my turn to come to the meeting, which is at 6 p.m., I leave my things and go. On that day the daughter-in-law is the one who does the cooking, and she's the one who invites us to eat. It's just me and my daughter. And that's the day that I don't do the cooking. We organise ourselves. I'm a very organised woman, to tell you the truth.

A: And what do you hope for the future with this Committee?

M: Well, I think that they have done their work well, and if they said that we have to do other things and continue looking after the water, making sure that they don't take it away from us and that we go further, I think that I will continue in the group. Because I have seen that they have fought as hard as they can for us. And not only for us, but also for those who don't go to the meeting and are not interested. At the end of the day we are all going to benefit from the well. So yes, they will continue to count on me in any way.

A: And with the water issue, what are your expectations for the future?

M: Well, first of all I would like to thank the Committee, because we fought for it, and it was achieved. And to continue taking care of it, so that now it won't be lacking for my grandchildren, or my grandchildren's children. So that they can still have water. Because I'm on my way out, and who knows what will happen in the future. But as long as we can continue to support the Committee, we will be there.

A: And what do you value and value for your neighbourhood and your community?

M: I value everything, the fact that I have a place to live, and that my parents fought to have all this. And if they gave it their all, I also believe that we shouldn't stop there. We should carry on with what they instilled in us. Taking care of the water and making sure the house lacks nothing. Because they fought for something, and everything is valued in general.

A: Were they involved in the faenas (community work) and all that?

M: Yes, there was union before. Not today. Before there was a lot of unity, and we used to say "neighbour this, neighbour that". Today there are no more neighbours who fight for this, because they are the children of those who fought. And that has kind of been lost. But for example, if they told me "this and that", well, I would support them. Because I learnt it as a child. Carrying water far away or being taught to save water. My sister would say "you're an exaggerator because you can wash a lot of dishes with a bucket". That's how I was taught, and that's how I learned it. I was the biggest in my house, and the others were smaller and didn't notice. But one who was older did notice. I was six years old when I came here.

A: And do you remember what it was like...

M: Yes, because the school here were classrooms, and I didn't have papers, I wasn't registered. I was registered at that age, at six years old. And I came to school when I was seven, so that's why I remember well.

A: And so you remember that there was a lot of togetherness

M: There was a lot of togetherness. Then there were neighbours who said to me "your mum used to pick up the hammer, she used to break stones". And I did see her, I saw my mum and dad splitting stones. The neighbours. Because it was totally stone here. There were little cardboard houses. I arrived when the little cardboard houses were there.

A: And now there is less or no union at all?

M: No, the truth is that there is no union. People are very apathetic about it all. And we see it at the meeting. When they need a water truck they do go. When they don't, they don't even show up, there are only two or three who go. So it's not worth it, because if we are getting support, I think we have to give support to the Committee. That's what I think.

A: Do you think that the Committee can help to bring about this unity in some way?

M: It could be yes. For example, if we were to run out of water, there would be a sense of unity. Because it is a vital liquid that we all need. And then there would be that unity, I imagine.

A: As if it were driven by necessity...

M: Yes, there are many people who politicise it. There are two or three out there who don't give water trucks, they don't support it. There are things that divide, and if there wasn't that division maybe people would come around. But I think that those of us who are on the Committee should be in charge of distributing that information to the neighbours. So that they can see that it was not Sheinbaum or Giovani, but the Committee that made sure that we had water here.

A: Like the time the well was done so that everyone could come in and see.

M: Yes, it was a very good thing. But it was only the people from the Committee, it wasn't anyone from outside.

A: So you say share information, but more...

M: Extensive, with all the neighbours and so on. That the well was not thanks to those politicians, but rather an achievement and demand of the Committee before the Mayor's Office and SACMEX.

A: Thank you very much for your time and your words.

M: I hope this is useful for your thesis and that it has been clear.