**Transcription of Interview with Alma**

Place: Alma’s House

Date and time: 11 January, 2023, starting at 14 hrs

Duration: 43:23 mins

Additional observation notes: The interview is at Alma's house, in her dining room. I arrive at her house and greet her, and she welcomes me for the interview. There are family members nearby or passing by during the interview: her mother and daughter, also her father who passes by carrying his daughter at one point during the interview. I notice that her mother is listening because she makes some comments during the interview. I invite her to participate, but she doesn't want to join in. Alma decides to try the participant diary. It was not very clear whether the interview would be with just her, or with more people from her family, as her sister and father have also been involved in the Committee. She told me that it would only be with her.

Participants:   
Interviewer [A] ; Alma [Alma]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: Thank you very much for taking this time for the interview. We can start with an introduction about yourself.

Alma: My name is Alma, I am 51 years old. I am married, I have two daughters. One of them is a graduate and the other one is in high school. I am dedicated to my home, and I am at your service.

A: Thank you very much. To begin with, can we talk about your first memories of living here in the neighbourhood?

Alma: Well, we have been here for maybe 40 or 45 years. I came here as a child… 48 years we have here. I was little. When we came here everything was stone, everything was deserted. There was no drainage, no water, no electricity. We started from scratch. My mother tells us that it was very difficult, especially in terms of water, because they had to go far to fetch it. And especially the women, the women were the ones who had to do the hard work at home, because most of the men worked. We were small, there were four of us. And the oldest was me, so that's what I remember, that's what I remember. We always, always suffered from water until they started working on the water pipes. They started to work, all the men worked, they dug their trenches to put in the pipes.

So I don't really remember when the water started coming into the houses, but I guess it took a long time, because I have very distant memories of when the water trucks used to come. Water trucks would come and then we would go and fetch water. They were water trucks that had taps that went upwards, and that's where the buckets were put, and the drums were carried to wherever there was room for the people.

The people were very poor, they were like parachutists, they were called parachutists. And they had very few things to fill up their little drums or their buckets. And it was kind of fun for us, because we would carry little buckets in which we would throw the water on the road. By the time we got home we were almost out of water.

And that's what I remember. Even later there were more pipes in the houses, I imagine. But I used to go with my mother to fetch water, because the water came at night. So if we didn't get water at night, we didn't have water for the next day. And it didn't arrive every day, so we had to be there at two or three in the morning to look after it. And we had to fill our little tanks. That was a long time, I don't remember how many years. And from then on it was easier, they kept fixing the streets, the water.

We've never had a very good service, because it was always very restricted. Maybe it was because of the neighbourhood, or because there was little water, I don't really know. And that's how time went by. Later I remember that there was easier water. However, my mother decided at one point to build a pool, a very small one, so that we could store more water. It was easier, because she was already working. So we had the pool, we filled it up, and the pipes were put in.

And so we went on like that for another time, until about fifteen years ago, I think, we started to suffer from water shortages again. Because we had water for a while, it wasn't like that every day. And sometimes the water was dirty. Sometimes it arrived well, and sometimes it arrived with very low pressure.

Afterwards, well, I'm very bad at dates, but I remember when we started with the Committee for the Electricity, there was always some people's concern that we should look into the water issue. Because it was also starting to fail a lot. That's when we started a small committee for that. And we started to make trips with the authorities. When they wanted to or when they could, but always as a group so that they would listen to us. And that was about six or seven years ago, when we started the Committee again and it was stronger. As I was saying, we were a small Committee, but it had value, it had weight, because the authorities paid attention to us, and there were spaces for dialogue.

But then, as the water became scarcer, there were times when we were short of water for one, two or three months. That's how we came to lack water. So we had to ask for water trucks, but in order to get a water truck, we had to wait and see what would happen. Because sometimes it would take up to three or four weeks for them to bring us a water truck.

That's when they started to get to know our Committee, our defence of water. And one person came along and said "well, we're going to create a WhatsApp group to become a bigger group". And we formed a bigger Water Defence Committee. That's when the Committee was formed, about two years ago, I think, I think. And that's when more water was gathered, more people, sorry.

And it was good to have a Committee because it became big. But people were also, well, very comfortable, because they joined the Committee to have a benefit, which was a water truck. And that without even working, without even going to a meeting, without even going on a tour like we did. Because we were more united. So in those tours we started to look at the wells, the way in which the authorities could enter the houses to see if the water intakes were OK. Or if there was no water, because we really didn't have any. The neighbourhood was divided into a high and a central zone, and we saw which well supplied each zone. So I've never known which well supplies us, because when they say it goes to the high zone, sometimes it supplies us, because we are in the central zone. And in the central zone they started to distribute the days, the tandeo. So it was our turn from Thursday at two o'clock in the afternoon to Monday at two o'clock in the afternoon. Here we are in the central area. The high zone was from Monday to Thursday. But even then it was not respected, the water arrived when they wanted it to. We continued with the lack of water, the water trucks, it was a mess. Until we asked for the working group again. There were many working groups. Even during the pandemic we were working, and a commission was formed, because they didn't receive all the people. That commission was made up of five or six people. I didn't really go to all of them.

And that's when they started to negotiate. There were meetings, there were water trucks, and we started to have a little more water. But it was based on water trucks, which was not essential, because we wanted water, but in the mains. And there was a lot of struggle, a lot of work, especially from my colleagues on the Commission. But I think a lot was achieved. It was when we started to look at plots of land, and we started to look at places for a well.

That was five or six years ago, when we started to look at the idea of a well. They always denied us, they said that there was no place, that there was no budget, but they didn't give us alternatives. Then, as they began to see that people were getting annoyed, they began to say "oh well, the people really need it and it's better to keep them calm". And that's when they started to see if the well could be built. At first they said we should look for a place. They said, "oh well, if it's easy, then you tell us what to do". We looked for places, but they didn't want to, we looked for a place, but no, they didn't agree. Until finally they were told about a place here in Atl. They studied the area a lot and they said yes, SACMEX (the city's water system) said yes. But then they started to put their foot down and said no, because the place was too small. But as they kept insisting, the commission kept working and so they said "well, let's start". But the mayor didn't support it, the mayor left, they sent someone else. It was always a problem

But the committee's fight was always at one hundred per cent, and I think that's what worked. It wasn't so much his government, but the people's struggle. Above all, it was the need for water. And finally it was set in motion. It was monitored during the construction period, which was almost a year. All the neighbours agreed, and every day a person would go to check that they were working and pass on the report to the Committee for their work groups. And that's how the well was finally delivered. It took years of work, a long time, but it finally came to fruition.

And now that the well is up and running, we do have water. They said it was going to be a tandeo (daily rationing of water), and we still don't know if that is going to be the case. But at least in this house we have water almost every day. It's only been one or two days since they started it up.

A: So have you noticed a difference since the well has been working?

Alma: Yes, we have water now. Sometimes with very good pressure, and sometimes with low pressure. But almost every day we have water.

A: Did you have an event or inauguration when the well was started up?

Alma: No, not yet. Because the day it was delivered they agreed on a time and then they said no, not always. They spoke on a Monday and said "the well is going to be delivered at such and such an hour, and it's going to start at such and such an hour". And they didn't have time to tell anyone. So it's still pending. But all the neighbours know that the well is already working. There were some faults with the electricity, some leaks. But apparently they've fixed them.

A: So you tell me that more or less fifteen years ago the problem of not having water started, even though the pipes and the network were already in place.

Alma: Yes, that's when it was most noticeable. Well, we came to the conclusion that it was because there has been a lot of construction in this neighbourhood. There are a lot of flats, a lot of houses. So that means that there are more people. And then with more people there is more water, more waste and more consumption.

A: And since then you have resorted to asking for water trucks, how did you deal with that situation?

Alma: Yes, to ask for water trucks. We asked for water trucks, but we were told to "call a number". Let's say, to the mayor's office. And what they did was give out turns. But the water arrived and we never got our turn. In other words, it was very, very rare when a water truck arrived at the houses. Sometimes we had to buy it. A water truck costing 1100 or 1200 pesos.

A: And that one did arrive?

Alma: Yes, because that water truck is private. So since it's paid for, it does arrive. They say that these water trucks are also filled in government wells, let's say. But who is behind them? I don't know, to be honest. But they get paid, the private ones.

A: Before that, when they received water trucks and brought water from their drums, were they private or government water trucks?

Alma: I imagine they were from the government.

A: And did they have to call them back then, or did they already know that the water truck would come from time to time?

Alma: I guess they knew that there was no water and they sent the water trucks. Because it wasn't like to deliver to a house, it was to go to a corner and people would go and fill up their buckets or their drums.

A: And then they would carry it from there.

Alma: Yes, to their homes

A: And that was daily?

Alma: No, I think it was once or twice a week.

A: But even so, they were used to doing it...

Alma: Yes, they already knew that a water truck would arrive and everyone would run to the water truck to fetch water.

A: So the issue of water is something that has been around for many years...

Alma: Yes, it's been around for a long time. I came here when I was about five or six years old, something like that. And always, water was always a problem. That there was never any water.

A: And what does it mean or symbolise for you to have water?

Alma: Well, in a very personal way, it's a relief. Because if we have water we have everything. I mean, both physically, because we need it for hygiene, for personal hygiene as well as for the house. In other words, if we don't have water we have nothing. Without water we are always, like, "what do I do now? Do I bathe or do I wash? You always had to figure out what to do.

A: During the years of the pandemic, how did the lack of water affect you?

Alma: Oh no, too much. I mean, everyone had to be clean, everyone had to wash their hands, everything had to be washed. And we had no water. So that's when the Committee's support grew. That's when it worked more, and they sent the water trucks. We made another mini-committee, some of us to make lists, to ask for water trucks. To make the tandeo, and see who got what, who didn't. And as people's needs grew, the Committee started to send the pipes. And according to people's needs, the water trucks were distributed.

A: You tell me that you've been on several committees?

Alma: Yes

A: How did you first get involved in committee activities of this kind?

Alma: When the electricity thing started, which changed and was extinguished by Calderón, I was taking my daughter to kindergarten. And I kind of saw an announcement that we could file an injunction for the electricity. But I said, "oh, it's an injunction and this is going to be settled tomorrow", and I said "well, I'm going to file it". So there were several people on that committee who didn't just care about the electricity. They cared about everything, electricity, water, land. And there was always one person who said "water is life, water is vital". And it was like we started to separate, and that's where I found Waldo, in the Electricity Committee.

Then there was a kind of mishap, and we split up and formed a committee with Waldo. Waldo has been one of the people who has taught us that everything matters, not just one thing. So I like it, and I had a lot of time, I had a lot of health. And I got involved, that is, I liked it. And I liked learning, above all. And that's how I started, we started. I have a sister, she and I. But she went to Veracruz. But she went to Veracruz, so I was left on my own. And then it was my dad, he's also one of the people who has always supported me. And so we continued. We like to fight, not that they give us things, not that they give us things, like "here", no, to fight. I always tell my daughters, that tomorrow when I am no longer around, they will say "oh my mum was really cool, because she liked to fight, she liked to earn what she has, what we have now". So that's why, well, because I like it.

A: So after this committee you told me that you formed an electricity committee with Waldo.

Alma: Yes

A: And then you also formed a water committee?

Alma: We went with him, we continued with the electricity committee, and then we saw the problem in Aztecas. That was kind of the next thing. And there we saw how much water was being wasted. And we said "well, what an inconsistency that water is being thrown away here, and we don't have water in our houses". And it was like we supported the struggle for a long time. And from there we formed the water committee.

A: And you formed it because of this problem you had?

Alma: Yes.

A: And you told me that you did some tours. What was the whole process of going on the tours? Who went, or how did you come to an agreement?

Alma: Well, for example, there were meetings. The central government, SACMEX, or the Delegation, someone would come to the meetings. They would meet, and they would say "Santo Domingo has no water and there is a committee that wants a working group". But they never gave as if they would give in. So they would say "well, we're going to do a tour and we're going to see which houses don't have water". And that's how we would go, from Flores Park, we would walk many streets. Some people, not so much the committee, and the authorities. And we would go from the park to what is down there, in the most affected part without water.

A: Is that where the well is?

Alma: No further down, I think maybe as far as Tochtli. So they said "maybe it's a fault in their houses, the pipes aren't right". Or things like that. They would go into the houses to see and open the taps. The little keys of some of them are like that at the entrance of the houses. They were so suspicious that they would go and check the cisterns, the drums, that there was no water at all. They would go and open the taps. And then we would go to the wells. Near here there is a SACMEX well, on Grieta Street there is another well, and near the neighbourhood there is another one. All these wells were visited, because there are people who know how to calibrate them, how high the pressure has to be to reach the houses. So one of those people is Raúl, and Waldo, but I remember Raúl a lot, who said that they wanted to see how much he was calibrating to see why it wasn't reaching the houses. So they put up a lot of objections, but the Committee showed them with facts what was going on.

There was a time here, I think it was during the pandemic, or a little before, when the mayor, or on behalf of the mayor, asked us for copies of our voter's credentials in exchange for a water truck. And all of this was demonstrated to them, what the government was doing. So as a result of that they kind of realised and said "No, they do know. They know what they want, and they know what they have". And that's when the working groups began. Even during the pandemic we did tours, we held meetings there in the mayor's office of Coyoacán, and the working groups.

A: Was participating in these working groups something you had already done, or was it the first time?

Alma: No, I usually, as I don't know much, I don't speak. But I like to listen. So they were interesting discussions, where the Committee made them see their mistakes. There were times when they shouted at each other about the same thing. Because when the Committee would tell them how badly they were acting, they would get angry. And they would say "you are disrespecting us". And the Committee would say "it's not a lack of respect, it's a lack of work on your part. So it was like listening and learning what they were defending and how they were defending it.

A: And after that, the Committee began to grow.

Alma: Yes

A: How did the group start to grow?

Alma: Well, we started inviting people. The Committee itself started to invite people, and meetings started to be held every week. But there are people who are committed, and there are other people who just like to make a profit. And since during the pandemic there was no water here, there were a lot of people on the Committee. So up to fifteen or twenty water trucks a day were ordered.

But then when the water started to arrive daily, people started to leave. And now the Committee is small, for the same reason that many people left.

A: So there are people who are more interested in the need for water and others who have other commitments?

Alma: Yes, because, for example, there are some people who say "I always have water, but I am fighting for the people, I am fighting for everyone. Not just for me, because I always have water. And yes, sometimes when they take water away from the Cutzamala system we have water. I don't know why. Or sometimes when there has to be water in the high zone, we have water. But sometimes we don't have water, and the high zone does.

A: And so your motivation is more of a commitment to the neighbourhood in general?

Alma, Well, yes, although, for example, we have invited neighbours and they don't want to join in or cooperate. Because they always say "I don't have time, I have to work". So we have always said that we are going to do it for the benefit of ourselves and our children, who are the ones who will stay in the end. And even for the benefit of those who don't participate.

A: And have you had contact with neighbours who do want to go? You say "let's go" and they do go?

Alma: Yes

A: What do you think makes the difference between those who do and those who don't?

Alma: Most of the time the people who go are the older people. Because young people are very apathetic. I mean, it's really difficult to get a young person to attend a meeting. So let's say, if you invite a neighbour, the one who goes is the father, the mother, or the grandmother. But they are very old people who are sometimes sick and don't participate. But young people don't do anything. It is very rare for young people to want to participate.

A: When did you first hold the meetings in the street, on the corner that you do now?

Alma: Well, I think it was about two or three years ago.

A: How did you decide to hold the meetings there?

Alma: Well, it helps to inform people about the situation. So that people could see what was being done and try to bring more people together. To get more people to join and make the group bigger. So that people passing by could listen and see. Some people actually did join because they heard about it this way and because they saw us there. They would see us and ask " why is this happening?", and we tell them "because of the lack of water", and they would say "Ah, I want to be on this committee" They give us a number and they join the group.

A: Has the group been useful for asking for water trucks and reaching agreements?

Alma: Yes, at the beginning it was like asking for water trucks. Then it was to report the situation. And then through that group we started to see about the well, to monitor important information, or that there was going to be a meeting with an authority, things like that.

A: What have been the most important achievements of the Water Defence Committee? Besides the well, are there other things that have been achieved?

Alma: Well, I think the most important thing at the beginning was the tandeo. Why the tandeo? Because if we have dates, we say "oh, we get such and such days, and such and such days we don't". So you can take advantage of those days to wash, to do a thorough cleaning. And save for the days we are not going to have. I feel that this is a very important thing: that we have achieved a shift. Because before there was no tandeo, we had to guess when the water was going to arrive. And it was difficult to guess.

A: So with the tandeo you prepare for certain days?

Alma: Yes, exactly. Because, let's say, there are other groups, because there are more Committees, that close streets or avenues, for example. And once we wanted to support them and they became very rude, because they fight, they almost want to lynch the authorities. And they themselves say, the authorities say "as long as the people are like that they are not going to achieve anything, because there is no working table and you can't work like that". So once we tried to support them, but they didn't want to, they handle it differently.

A: Another group that was formed because of the water issue?

Alma: Yes, because of the water issue. But they are different from us. We have been taught that you have to know how to ask. And not to ask "please", but to know how to work. And one of those things is a working group, where you have to keep an agenda, and see what you want, what you are asking for. I feel that this is the way to achieve better things.

A: Have the working groups helped to reach agreements?

Alma: Yes, the working groups are for reaching agreements, and for informing. That is also an achievement, the fact that there are working groups. Because not everyone comes to the mayor's office and says: "I have a working group". In other words, that is also an achievement of the Committee.

A: When the tandeo was implemented, how did you find out whether or not other neighbours were getting water?

Alma: Through the WhatsApp group. There we all know when the upper zone has water, and when the lower zone has water. Well, the central area. The streets, the days, the pressure, and how the tandeo had been, were monitored and sent to the group.

A: One of the things I'm also interested in asking is, do you think there is a justice issue involved in the defence of water and the struggle you are waging?

Alma: Well... maybe yes. Let's say, if we handle it like this we can say "justice was finally done to us". Because we have been a very marginalised neighbourhood. They manage it as a very poor neighbourhood, with a lot of risk. So we were always like "ah Santo Domingo..." and we were simply marginalised. So now, thanks to our work, justice has been done for us with the well.

A: For you, the defence of water is connected to other things like electricity, land? Do you see these connections as well?

Alma: Well, I say yes, yes, it has to do with that. Because it is a necessity. The need is to have electricity, to pay a fee that we can afford. Because we have a service for health, to study, and so on. In other words, that's why we are also fighting for electricity. So that's where the water comes from and I say that it has to do with that. In the end they are struggles.

A: Another interesting part, for example in Aztecas, was the environmental issue, the waste of water. Do you think that is still present in some way in the Committee?

Alma: Yes, that is still present. In fact, there are still meetings. I'm not very well informed right now, but they are still in meetings. I mean, they are still, I think, with the PAOT ( environmental prosecutor's office), and I don't know where, but yes.

Everything goes hand in hand. I mean, finally, I think they are services, or they are needs that we have, and they all go hand in hand.

A: Another interesting part for me is the contact with neighbours, do you think that's important?

Alma: Yes. When we go to the meetings, we see different neighbours. Not even the ones in my street, but different neighbours who are also interested, and who are also in need of water. So, to a certain extent we have a kind of coexistence there because we talk, because we ask each other "do you have water?". I don't know, little things like that. It is like getting closer. And I feel that coexistence is also important.

A: Do you think that this socialising is something you did before the Committee?

Alma: No, because I don't really go out much, and now I'm going out, but I go to my meetings. I meet one person, I meet another, and so on.

A: So let's say, it's in those meetings that you do get to know each other...

Alma: Yes, there is an openness to know more about the neighbour, or their needs, let's say.

A: And for you, what would a good neighbour be?

Alma: Well, being a good neighbour could be that, to support each other in the struggle. Supporting each other in our needs. Knowing that it's not just me, but also the other person who is in the same situation. And learning that there are other people in need, like me.

A: You say that the meetings became very large, there was a great need at that time...

Alma: Yes, quite a lot. I mean, there were fifteen or twenty water trucks a day. In other words, it was a lot a week.

A: And thinking about the future, what do you imagine the Committee's activities or struggles to be?

Alma: Well, we say that the struggle doesn't end, the struggle begins. We already have the benefit of the well, but this is where the work comes in, because we have to continue monitoring, we have to continue taking care of it, we have to continue working on the issue. They told us that it would last for thirty years. But if we don't take care of it, it won't last thirty years. It's going to last us maybe ten years, and what are we going to do in ten or fifteen years? So the struggle doesn't end, the struggle continues, and how does it continue? Well, by remaining united, together, by continuing to work. Continuing to live together. Staying together.

A: What would be the risks or obstacles in the future? What would be the challenges?

Alma: Well, we have to teach, above all to those who come after us, how to take care of water. How they should recycle it in some way. We also have to teach them how to work. Because as I was saying, we are on our way out, but those behind us are coming, and they have to take care. Because this was an achievement, and I don't think another one will be achieved in five or ten years. It's going to be a bit difficult.

A: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience, or about what the Committee has been and what the struggle for water means to you?

Alma: Well, for me it is a very beautiful struggle. Because even though I live with my parents, I always try to integrate them with us. Because I like to participate, I like to learn in some way. And above all that the needs that we have, well, we can do our bit to make it happen. But I repeat, that is only with work, and then go ahead.

A: Thank you very much for receiving me in your home and for your time for the interview. I am at your disposal for anything you need, if there is anything you want to follow up, add or change.

Alma: On the contrary, thank you very much. I was telling my daughter that I don't know much, but I'm going to try to contribute something because you are a student. And just as I give you a little bit of a tool, I want you to give it to my daughter one day. Above all, I want it to be reciprocal, for her to have a chance with someone else. That's why I accepted. Not because I know a lot, but hopefully it will be of some use to you. And I'd be happy to. This is your house and if my dad says yes, I'll let you know.