

COVID-19 and responses of water services in the cities of the global south: The case of Arequipa, Peru

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Abstract

Since the first cases of Covid-19 were reported in March 2020 in Peru, the government declared a state of national emergency and ordered one of the first and strictest confinements in Latin America. While much of the economic and institutional activities came to a halt, essential public services such as water supply, including "informal" water supply, continued to operate. In this work, we address the responses of different public actors and local organizations to the challenges posed by Covid-19 in urban water supply in a

rapidly growing city like Arequipa (Peru). Through interviews, complemented by analysis of secondary sources, we explore the responses of formal and informal water providers to guarantee supply during the Covid-19 sanitary crisis and the differences between the urban core and the periphery. Among the most important actions, it is worth noting that the public water company in Arequipa (SEDAPAR) has implemented the fractionation of payment, suspension of water cuts and, very especially, the distribution of free water through tanker trucks, the latter targeting inhabitants without access to the public drinking water network who mostly live in the urban periphery. However, these efforts have been limited by operational problems in the public drinking water network, including frequent interruptions and supply cuts. In this sense, informal water providers played a key role in supply. A better understanding of the challenges and innovative responses implemented by water utilities to address the health and socio-economic crisis of Covid-19 in the Global South can contribute to progress towards the human right to water.

Keywords: Covid-19, public water, formal and informal city, Arequipa, Perú.