

Horizontes

de la Gestión Pública y Comunitaria del Agua

Popayán, Colombia, 2023



POPAYÁN DECLARATION

The Platform for Public and Community Partnerships of the Americas (PAPC) held the **Horizons of Public and Community Water Management Meeting on September 25, 26, 27, 2023** in the city of **Popayán, Cauca, Colombia**, to share knowledge and experiences and allow us to renew our understandings of new and old strategies of water dispossession and privatization and to confront, organize and fight against them.

People, organizations and movements from the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia met over three days in the capital of the Department of Cauca, paying homage to this Territory which sits at the confluence of centuries of struggles by Indigenous Peoples and Black and peasant communities in defense of land, cultures and water. But we regret to note that some of our comrades from Africa and Asia could not be here because of the injustice and racism that characterizes international mobility through the arbitrary and inequitable granting of visas and travel permits. We deplore the barriers to entry into Colombia for our compañerxs from the global South which demonstrate that international mobility is controlled by racist and colonial forces that limit the possibilities of face-to-face solidarity between formerly colonized peoples. We will insist on breaking down barriers, meeting and strengthening the exchanges of the peoples of the South.

With our presence in the Colombian massif, we also pay tribute to the great Cauca river in its upper basin, its tributaries, the rivers Molino, Piedras, PISOJÉ, Palacé, current sources of water supply for the city of Popayán. The river Vinagre, which originates in the old sulfur mine on the slopes of the Puracé Volcano, and the rivers Negro, Ejido, Blanco, Hondo, Saté, and Clarete are also part of this hydro-social mosaic that crosses the municipality of Popayán from east to west.

Water calls us, speaks to us, reminds us with its own voice that it is a living being. Water is in constant movement, it is cloud, sea and snow, river and lake, rain, dew and spring. Water moistens our land, the Pachamama, it gives life to the ecosystems on which we ourselves depend, we are part of them, we flow with them, and we must defend them.

Water is the birth of life and for some a gift of God and an expression of God's grace in perpetuity for all creation. It is a basic condition for all life on Earth and must be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and creation in general. Water is a source of health and

well-being and demands responsibility from human beings. Water is an element present in practically all living beings on the face of the earth. Water unites us.

We want to build a water democracy. Only an ethical, reciprocal, transparent, communal, non-profit and disinterested relationship with water can make democracy, coexistence and peace between us and water possible.

On the contrary, we observe processes that want us to relate to water with violence, interest, appropriation, and contempt. Processes that want to subject water and nature to the logic of markets, dominated by finance and financial agents in search of new market opportunities for private investment and profit. They make use of the deregulation of the economy and the withdrawal of the state and its corporate control, sweeping away everything common, everything public and communal. They want to trap, dominate and subdue water.

Financialization and New Strategies of Water Dispossession

In the current context, we are facing different manifestations of the privatization and commodification of water, such as its financialization. Past reports from UN Special Rapporteurs on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation have drawn attention to these issues. The water movement welcomes and supports the reports of the rapporteurs.

Companies, corporations and international cooperation agencies use a double discourse in their approaches to water management. On the one hand, they speak of rights, conservation and good governance while, on the other, they promote mechanisms of private capture, commodification and business schemes involving water and ecosystems. Among the most worrying proposals are the entry of water into financial markets and the conception of water as an asset open to speculation as to its future availability and value.

Threats to Public Management

In the context of the defeat of socialized production and of workers and popular struggles in these four long decades of neoliberalism, public and community water management has lived with and confronted the threat of finance capital's dominance and industrial and commercial capital's market delivery of essential services, which continue to advance in the grabbing of land rich in water and minerals and in the accumulation of information, knowledge and money. It is an era marked by: environmental crisis and change forced by the unbridled use of so-called Artificial Intelligence that changes the labor environment by leaps and bounds and leads to more accumulation and dispossession, to more poverty and exodus, multiplying the people that capitalism does not need; a state-market relationship at the service of accumulation and dispossession and not of welfare and social integration, and; increasing poverty and forced migration due to wars and climate change.

Corporate and mafia capture of welfare states goes hand in hand with the privatization of politics and threatens public sovereignty over water management. Associated legal frameworks favor privatized models of water management and the financialization of the commons. Pro-privatization laws and regulations have turned public agencies into commercial and industrial enterprises governed by private law. Public-private partnerships have also been promoted. Corruption, nepotism and political patronage are practices that threaten the legitimacy and transparency of public administration.

The monopolistic control of the media, social network algorithms and the privatization of information and communication processes colonize the circulation of data, knowledge and narratives around water management. They undermine and distort water management as a public institution and promote individualism, breaking solidarity links in the workplace and in the community. In addition, public agencies outsource components of the supply chain, make workers precarious and divide them, and break the bonds of community in public water management entities.

These processes of corporatization, financialization and discrediting of public and community water management and sanitation go hand in hand with the neglect, abandonment or private appropriation of the water resources on which we all depend for our survival. Problems of contamination from pesticides, industrial waste, inadequate garbage disposal, mining and its wastes threaten the integrity of public water management, our health and offload onto the community the problems created by private interests.

Threats to Community Water Management

A kaleidoscope of thousands of community organizations of very different types, forms and dimensions guarantee material access to water for millions of people on our continents. They are invisible and yet they guarantee access to water and life to a huge number of communities. Laws and norms become obstacles to their very existence because they seek to corporatize them and ignore their roots, their complexity and diversity as social and solidarity economy organizations, as community organizations, as organizations of neighbors that guarantee access and supply of water to households.

Mega-mining, monocultures and contamination by agrochemicals, deforestation in water recharge zones, urban sprawl and extractive megaprojects threaten the existence of associations, water boards, community aqueducts and cooperatives that carry out community water management. In addition, the lack of technical assistance and the expropriationist stance of certain sectors of our states undermine the capacity and legitimacy of our community organizations that, in addition to providing water to our community members, carry out environmental management that protects, restores, recovers, and conserves watersheds, wetlands, aquifers and springs.

New mercantilist projects such as water funds and certain, misnamed, nature-based solutions, seek to turn natural goods into monetarily valued resources, putting at risk the water sources and water sovereignty of our communities and peoples.

Water Defenders

The defense of water often puts at risk the physical and psychological integrity and the very life of our comrades, our organizations and the permanence of our communities in their territories. In turn, action in defense of public water management carried out by trade union organizations is risky for our fellow workers in public and private companies. It highlights the situation in Colombia, a country where, according to the Ombudsman's Office, more than 1,000 human rights defenders and social leaders have been assassinated since 2016.

We commit to act in solidarity to take care of our compañerxs, our organizations and communities. We will act responsibly in the face of risk and threat by equipping ourselves with

the necessary tools. Likewise, we call on the civil societies of all peoples to commit themselves to care for and protect the lives and physical integrity of all water defenders, with special attention to women.

Our Alternatives and Proposals

We want to live in our rural territories and in our neighborhoods and cities with tranquility, in peace, working and studying, recreating our existence, enjoying our families and communities, and this is only possible in alliance with water. Our freedom is linked to the freedom of water, that is why our life is its defense, and our solidarity management is the struggle against its privatization and commodification.

Public-Community Partnerships

We will continue to promote agreements between municipalities and between public and community organizations as alternatives to privatization and articulations between civil society and local governments with concrete actions that claim and work for the human right to water and the right to community self-management of water.

Remunicipalization

We support processes to recover water management and return it to public hands. We commit ourselves to exchanging experiences that allow us to reverse privatization processes and prevent threats to existing public bodies. We will strengthen actions to transform the legal frameworks that protect and defend the privatization of water management. We will support and promote legislative initiatives for the human right to water and public, community and participatory water management. We will promote citizen observatories that guarantee citizen participation and demand transparency in management, investigation of the actions of transnational corporations abroad and denunciation of human and environmental rights violations.

It has been noted, through experiences of remunicipalization and the recovery of companies, that private management is more expensive than public management, one focused on profit and income, the other on guaranteeing access to and supply of water in democratic conditions of justice, equity and equality.

Blue Communities

We will promote Blue Communities, Blue Schools and Blue Universities as institutions and movements committed to values, principles and practices that recognize and defend water as a common good and a fundamental human right. For us, they are an opportunity to build a new narrative and make visible community alternatives to privatization that go beyond the public-state.

The Blue Community certificate gives legitimacy and international recognition to the practices developed collectively in our communities and organizations. It is a distinction that links communities with social organizations and public institutions in other places that have assumed similar commitments.

The People's Water Forum: International Coordination

Since 2003, the Alternative World Water Forum's (FAMA in Spanish) have contributed to solidifying the articulation of civil society and water movements. We organized the Mexico FAMA in 2006, the Istanbul FAMA in 2009, the Marseille FAMA in 2012, the Brasilia FAMA in 2018 and the Dakar FAMA in 2022. Year after year, FAMA after FAMA, we have realized that the Alternative World Water Forum is no longer an alternative space, but the Forum that our peoples, communities, societies and governments need. The democratic quality and the understanding of water as a human right and vital common good harbor a greater representativeness that shapes us as the People's Water Forum.

Feminist, Anti-Racist and Intersectional Perspectives in Water Movements

Neoliberal water policies are part of a racist, colonial and patriarchal system. We recognize and incorporate as our own values the transformations experienced by humanity initiated by the women's movement and feminism in private life and the public sphere, in work, language and politics. We defend these victories, deepen them and fight for justice, equality and gender equity in our communities, organizations and movements.

We reject racism and all forms of discrimination against sexual diversity. We assume an intersectional perspective and approach in the life of our organizations and networks. In our struggle against water dispossession, we commit ourselves not to reproduce its violence in our organizational structures and practices, and to guarantee equality and equity in all areas of life, organizations and processes of struggle for the defense of water, life and territories.

Organizing towards Bali, Indonesia

We commit ourselves to actively participate in the preparations and mobilization towards Bali, where the next World Water Forum will be held. We are organizing alongside and in solidarity with our comrades in Indonesia.

Heading to El Salvador

20 years after the emergence of the Inter-American Network for the Defense and Right to Water, REDVIDA, when leaders and representatives of social organizations met in San Salvador, El Salvador, we stand in solidarity with the Salvadoran people who suffer the arbitrariness of a repressive dictatorship and a clear disregard for human rights. We bear witness to political persecution and the arbitrary arrest of human rights defenders and political, social and community activists, which have encouraged migration and exile. We stand in solidarity and support the just struggles for the defense of life with all rights for all people. We will send a solidarity mission and hold the VII assembly of the REDVIDA in this country in 2024.

Joyful, transparent and in movement like water.

Popayán, September 27, 2023.

Networks

Platform for Public and Community Partnerships of the Americas, PAPC

Africa Water Justice Network, AWJN

Inter-American Network for the Defense and Right to Water, REDVIDA

National Network of Community Water Systems of Colombia

National Network of Water Boards of El Salvador

Consortio de Juntas de Agua de Sucumbíos, Napo y Orellana, Ecuador

European Water Movement, EWM

Italian Forum of Water Movements, Italy

People's Water Forum, PWF

Ecumenical Water Network, EWN

Ecumenical Water Network, Brazil

International Organizations

Blue Planet Project

Public Services International

Transnational Institute, TNI

Organizations

Fundación Abril, Bolivia

Sindicato Agrario Villa Flor de Pucara, Bolivia

Federação Nacional dos Urbanitários, FNU, Brasil

Observatório Nacional dos Direitos à Água e ao Saneamento, ONDAS, Brazil

ENDA, Colombia

Sindicato de Trabajadores de ACUAVALLE, SINTRACUAVALLE, Colombia

Corporación Ecológica y Cultural Penca de Sábila, Colombia

Asociación Comunitaria Unida por el Agua y Agricultura, ACUA, El Salvador

Ingeniería Sin Fronteras, ISF, Spain

Centro de Voluntariado Internacional, CeVI, Italy

African Water Commons Collective, South Africa

emp'ACT, Switzerland