Content

Editorial

Presenting the Platform

Red VIDA: The Seed of the Platform

Partnerships Supported by the Platform

Improving Water Management in Cochabamba

Experiences with Public-Community Agreements in Columbia

Water Workers in the Face of Privatization
Editorial

In OSE’s (Uruguay’s state water utility) Paso Severino Park there is a dam of the same name that holds the reservoir for the country’s largest water treatment plant, Aguas Corrientes.

In April 2009, in this beautiful place on the shores of the Santa Lucia River, the Platform for Public-Community Partnerships of the Americas was launched. The event was attended by representatives from social and government organizations from Bolivia (the Water and Life Defense Coordinator and the Ministry of Water), Ecuador (the Andean Coordinator of Water Unions of the ISP), Peru (workers from FENTAP), Argentina (workers from the SOSBA union from ABSA), Germany (the TNI Institute), the Netherlands (CEO), Spain (ISF: Engineers without Borders) and Uruguay (the National Commission in Defense of Water and Life, FFOSE water Union of Uruguay, the National Water Board and OSE), as well as representatives from different chapters of resistance to the privatization of water.

For more than a decade these countries (and others like Colombia, Brazil, Paraguay, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, the United States, Canada and Chile) have proposed public models to manage common goods like water. Through the dreams, concepts and experiences over the years, this bulletin will attempt to demonstrate what it means to consolidate a Platform to exchange public community experiences.
It will aim to explain an idea that is simple, cheaper and quicker, seeking to apply it to the public water and sanitation sector: Applying solidarity, reciprocity, transparency, simplicity to the management of an essential resource for life, along with efficiency, efficacy and non-profit economic self-sustainability and including other aspects such as preventive healthcare, education and environmental balance. It will demonstrate why what is public does not only concern the state, but concerns everyone. It will underscore the strength and efficiency that can be achieved when it is possible to share skills among water system operators.

Latin America contains 26% of the accessible water for human consumption yet approximately 80 million people have no access. Those who are involved in managing these systems have a great responsibility to participate in the struggle for the concept “water is life.” Those of us who do have access to water have a great responsibility to join efforts, to share technologies and knowledge beyond the frontiers of our countries; to think of this process as a unique strategic route to make water into a fundamental human right.

Approximately 1.2 billion people do not have access to water. Under its Millennium Goals, the United Nations aims to reduce the lack of access to water by 50 percent. Human Rights will continue to be violated if we don’t resolve the problems of the human right to water. Water is essential to 90 percent of our daily activities and it would be unthinkable to go two days without water.

In July, at the United Nations Assembly, 122 countries signed the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and no-one voted against this principle. This encourages us because it opens the possibility for new proposals to emerge, and that the signatory nations will invest resources in ensuring this right is fulfilled.
We firmly believe that if knowledge and non-profit technology is exchanged, and we work to build the social control of the system, we will be able to meet ambitious goals aimed at ensuring that water belongs to everyone universally.

We hope that our first bulletin serves to disseminate the work of the Platform, its objectives, its principles and the importance of Public-Community Partnerships in the context of the global defense of water, understood as a common good and a human right.
Presenting the Platform

How Was the Platform Born?

At the start of the millennium, during the opening of the struggle for water, the movements came together. Initially this was under the umbrella of the anti-privatization campaign and the firm opposition to all types of commercialization. Over the course of the decade there have been broad and in depth processes that have moved beyond mere criticism and into the search for alternatives to neoliberal models. Alternatives that involve both old and new visions, values and progressive concepts, both as action and as a collective representation opposed to market policy, to hierarchies and exploitation.

For this, the water movements have had to clarify the multiple meanings of water from the patrimony of “Pachamama”, to water as a human right and as a common good. In the trajectory of the struggle and debate, which brings to life the transversal and liberating dimensions of water, it was demonstrated that patrimony, the right and the common good are not absolute categories but rather processes, the results of actions, specifically collective actions. As a result, today we see that the challenge lies at a global level, in each struggle and each territory, to discover how to organize, how to envision and then how to construct a new world. In the debates about the shape and form of a progressive alternative in a reality dominated by capitalism and violence, there can be no definitive response. We are only going to learn by asking along the way. Moreover, there must be specific responses to each individual situation.

The movements joined together in existing spaces (specifically the unions that already had global organizations) or in new ones such as social movements like Red VIDA in the Americas, and the Network To Demand Public Water at a global level. These are the networks that have given rise to the construction of the alternative visions and mechanisms presented by the Platform for Public-Community Partnerships of the Americas (PAPC), contributing to the resistance and defense struggles.
What is the Platform?

The Platform is a horizontal, multi-sectoral organization that is opposed to privatization, commercialization and outsourcing. It emerged from the initiative of members of Red VIDA and forms part of the continental network. The vision of the platform proposes that public companies, community services and cooperatives adopt Public-Community Partnerships based on non-profit solidarity as a tool for democratization, the improvement of management and the realization of strengths and skills from the public and community sectors. It also proposes that training and realization of their own efforts be the main impetus for the human right to water. That this should be the most important tool in the defense and promotion of the public -community management of water when it is in the hands of states, communities, cooperatives, organized peoples or other entities that prioritize social, cultural and health related reasons above economic ones.

What Activities Form Part of the Platform?

There are three main axes of action in the Platform that are developed both by its members and by the office of the Platform. The first axis is focused on the Public-Community Agreement projects, the second is a system of twinning and the third includes the investigation and dissemination of informative and educational materials. All of these actions seek direct and effective collaboration with companies or water systems, their workers, organizations and social movements. They address the political challenge of keeping water in public and community hands as well as

Mission of the Platform

To initiate, support and promote the exchange of management experiences through Public-Community Partnerships between different public firms, cooperatives and community systems. To work on a common multi-sectoral organization, on democratization, and strengthening of the public-community management of water.
the democratization of water management outside the capitalist market to therefore avoid the exploitation of nature and the people. With this purpose, the platform also seeks cooperation and, where necessary, critical intervention at a global and regional level within the spaces for political operation, such as the Global Water Operators Partnership Alliance (GWOPA).

Achievements of the Platform:
New Partnership Agreements
The Platform promotes and encourages agreements to strengthen community self-management. In Cochabamba the Platform fostered a Community-Community agreement between two water committees in the southern region. This resulted in substantial improvements to their systems as well as their administrative and organizational management.

Exchange agreement signed between San Miguel Water Committees Km 4 and Sebastian villa APAAS Payer
The Twinning System

The Platform proposes bringing together and systematizing the needs of businesses and water systems to allow them to meet and begin the creation of new APCs. This system will begin to be constituted through a survey and opinion poll at a regional level. Later, an international event will be carried out in 2011 that will bring together the potential firms and systems to jointly elaborate the twinning system. The objective of this process is the creation of a database of information for twinning. Initially this will be available for the offices and later the aim is to create a service on the internet for the members and allies of the platform. This will be the foundation for the new APCs that the Platform seeks to facilitate.

Facilitation and Support for the APCs.

The Platform is supporting Public-Community Agreement projects both in the initial preparation phases...
and the implementation phases. These Partnerships could be the result of proposals from members of the Platform or from the twinning system that is being constructed.

Each company, system, institution, water union or organization that is interested in the APCs and that is in agreement with the principles of the Platform is invited to contact us and to participate.

There are different forms of participation, from the use of informative material about the APCs, sharing experiences, supplying or using different tools, involvement in APC projects, to being a full member of the Platform. The points of contact are the members or the Platform. The companies and systems, their governing bodies, unions and social organizations can find a framework within this body as well as resources such as progressive alternatives to the privatization and the commercialization of water management.

How does the Platform Work?

The Platform is a collective process that began in 2009 at an international event in Uruguay. Currently, the platform has two offices: Fundacion Abril in Cochabamba, Bolivia and another at OSE in Montevideo, Uruguay. The governing body of the Platform is the Coordination Group that includes the most active members. Here decisions are made collectively in monthly meetings via the internet.

The Platform has a web page where it is possible to find information about the work that is currently underway.
RedVida: the seed of the platform

The Inter-American Network For the Defense of the Right to Water was founded in August 2003 in El Salvador at a meeting of 54 organizations from 16 countries to launch a hemisphere-wide campaign in defense of water as a human right.

The VIDA Network is made up of women’s groups, environmental organizations, unions, public and community systems and other social movement from the Americas.

The priorities of the network are:

- To strengthen the public and community management of public services through policies of technical cooperation, sharing investigations and analysis and developing successful public service models.
- To develop and carry out campaigns to resist new forms of privatization of public services and free trade partnerships.
- To promote solidarity and develop skills within those regions and countries were efforts are being made in defense of water.

The work areas of Red VIDA are:

- The Andean Water School
- The Platform of Public-Community Partnerships
- Establishing water as a common good and creating the Constitutional Reports that promote water as a human rights.

Regarding Public-Community Partnerships, a recent report demonstrated there are more than 130 projects of this type in 70 countries, which demonstrates that it is an emerging model with significant potential. Red VIDA is an active promoter of this type of agreement, which has impelled and supported the creation of a regional platform.
A Public - Public Agreement or a Public - Community Agreement is an agreement between two parties that are committed to collaborating together, exchanging knowledge and experience to improve and make more efficient the public management of water and sanitation. At the same time, it is a strategic and political tool that, together with helping improve the public management of water and sanitation, makes it possible to prevent any type of privatization.

The aim of the Platform is that these Partnerships take place between two bodies that are responsible for managing water – they can be public businesses, self-managing associations, organizations of alternative systems, professionals from the service etc, who do not necessarily come from the same area. As a result, the Partnerships can be local, national or international. It is important to note that in these Partnerships the two parties are equal partners, which is to say there is no hierarchy but rather a framework of mutual respect.

The values and principles that inspire the Platform are established within a general framework that guides the type of agreement that the body will support and manage. In this sense, and given that the aim of the agreement is to improve water
service and supply, it is essential that it does not involve any type of commercialization or privatization of the resource either during or after the agreement has been finalized.

We said that the APCs are solidarity organizations because we are willing to share our successful experiences with others so that they can improve their businesses or associations without incurring an economic cost.

The transfer of knowledge should be free as part of an agreement that is primarily nurtured by the commitment and goodwill of the parties. The agreements are reciprocal because although one party may be in the position of “collaborator,” later they may become the beneficiary of the agreement.

The Public-Community Partnerships operate within the Platform as small projects. Each of them must follow defined phases that begin with a request to the Platform presenting a specific need. The Platform will manage the implementation of the project and will provide follow-up until the end of the agreement.

The areas of action that the Partnerships cover are:

- **a.** Formation and training of human resources (technical and administrative)
- **b.** Technical assistance
- **c.** Institutional strengthening
- **d.** Motivating the participation of the community in social control and commitment.

The Platform expects that the Partnerships promote the permanent participation of the community, workers, organizations, social movements and other bodies that can aid in the successful completion of an agreement.

The Platform is a collective space, not only to exchange experiences and transfer knowledge but also for dialogue and discussion both about the daily problems of access to water but also about macro-social issues that require lobbying at a political level.
Improving Water Management in Cochabamba

As part of the Yaku al Sur project, and with the support of the Platform, workshops were held in 2010 between the community water systems of Cochabamba’s southern zone. The different organizations came together to openly share knowledge, experience and technologies with the stakeholders in plain language. The exchange events helped create the first contact between the Villa San Miguel Km 4 Association of Water and Sewerage, and the Association of Production and Administration of Water and Sanitation (APAAS). These water systems are located in Districts 8 and 14 in the southern municipality of Cercado and have similar water management characteristics. The technicians of the Platform took part in the workshops and meetings, interacting with the participating organizations and listening to their experiences of managing their community water systems. From these meetings the first Community-Community agreement was formed between these organizations.

This was the first Community-Community Agreement developed in the south of Cochabamba. Both committees have exchanged experiences in a horizontal manner, holding participatory workshops in different areas, tours of water systems, installation of some equipment, and other complementary activities to further strengthen community management.

The Community Partnership Agreement primarily involved the representatives and the technical teams of the two systems APAAS and San Miguel. APAAS with their accumulated experience in water management would share their experience and knowledge and San Miguel would receive the information and strengthen their technical and administrative management.
The Community-Community Agreement has served to share knowledge, achievements, conflicts and concerns not only about the technical operation of the system, but also on issues related to the organization, self-management, working conditions, relationships with the Basic Territorial Organizations (OTBs) and the constant complaints about the lack of state attention.

During the implementation of the Community Agreement the parties have developed several activities including coordination meetings, exchanges, workshops and visits to community systems, but also have shared in the social and cultural activities organized by the committees.

Key achievements:

a. Implementing computerized billing and collection. As a result of the exchanges of experience and workshops on administrative matters it was decided to implement a computer system for San Miguel. This will allow greater transparency in charging for water consumption and will streamline financial reporting.

b. Air vents. The representatives of San Miguel were very interested in this area because air flowing through the pipes and meters was causing problems with the users. Purgers have been installed in the San Miguel network and have been proven to reduce air circulation.

c. Well cleaning and maintenance in the San Miguel Community. Technicians from APAAS have explained the maintenance process, the measuring of static and dynamic water pressures, the characteristics of the pump and its components, how to change impellers, how to clean of pipes, etc.
d. Valuing local knowledge and experience. The horizontal processes and solidarity among the community systems allowed a revaluation of the practical knowledge built up over several years. Generally undervalued, the daily empirical experience within the community system provides great value to technicians and academy trained professionals.

e. Experience sharing. The experience sharing activities, workshops and visits were also spaces for political discussion on the strengths of the systems, discussions of labor problems, of technical or organizational issues, conflicts with Basic Territorial Organizations or neighborhood associations, etc. They also served as a forum to discuss government policies regarding water services and sanitation.

f. Relationships. The Community Agreement has established friendships and alliances between the two committees who will continue to share information and cooperate with each other to solve their everyday problems.
Experiences with Public-Community Agreements in Columbia

The community water systems in Columbia are popularly known as the Community Aqueducts. Their existence goes back to the first settlements and the creation of the municipalities early in the administration of Columbia. These systems exist throughout Columbia. They are especially prominent in rural areas where they are the only means of water supply available. They are also present in urban and semi-urban areas where they compete in the market with other suppliers. This situation makes the systems vulnerable to the threat of privatization and the commodification of water.

The national government, however, insists upon business management of what it calls the Water and Basic Sanitation Sector. It constantly focuses its consultancy, professional talent and financial resources towards the creation of for-profit companies and the transformation of community systems. The new organizations use a mixture of public and private capital thus ignoring years of community work and forcing the extinction of the community model.

Resistance

The organizations that perform the public and community management of water are resisting privatization. They are using a partnership model that has the primary goal of reclaiming water management and placing it in the hands of the community, as well as advocating for access to the water supply for the entire population.

At all levels, these partnerships presuppose the existence of Community-Community Agreements. I.e., each group expresses their free will and spontaneously joins with others to make joint demands and implement political and legal actions. They aim to impact the municipal, departmental and national governments as well as achieving international recognition.
This process of associating on different levels promotes community water systems in local government using legal and political arguments in favor of Public-Community Agreements. These strengthen the management by offering all kinds of advice to community based organizations as well as bringing economic investment to the water systems. Action is needed on this last point so that these organizations can continue as owners of the water systems and remain a viable alternative in these regions.

**Outstanding Achievements**

**a)** The basic principles for building partnerships based on solidarity and reciprocity among organizations from different sectors of society were implemented in the construction of the National Network of Community Aqueducts in Colombia.

**b)** Alliances have been formed on many levels. Firstly, support has been given from Platform members La RedVIDA and RPW (Reclaiming Public Water Network) in direct connection with national organizations. Secondly, alliances have been formed between community water systems, water supply networks and support organizations in Colombia (CENSAT Agua Viva - Friends of the Earth Colombia, Corporación Ecológica y Cultural Penca de Sábila, CINEP and ENDA.) These groups participated throughout the year-long process. Thirdly, new organizations from across the country have been included in the National Network.

**c)** The project was carried out horizontally with care paid to the needs of the communities and Community Aqueducts, determining step-by-step the best way to carry out activities. Structural planning performed early in the process gave priority to local and regional workshops building towards progressive national agreements. These eventually led to a comprehensive and appropriate agreement.
d) The development strategy was presented in the proposal. It covered all of the activities maintaining coordination between supporting organizations and grassroots organizations and communities. Within the strategy it is important to note the empowerment of community networks and aqueducts who, in addition to participating in activities, acted as agents for proper conduct, both logistical and political, thus achieving a working strategy that promoted the continuity and sustainability of the process.

The Declaration of Cartagena at the Third National Meeting of Community Aqueducts established two very important commitments to consolidating these processes, articles and links to the Platform:

"We believe that the supply of, and access to, water is a fundamental human right that can only be guaranteed by democratic and transparent public management. That is why we are committed to making our own law through popular initiatives in assemblies from every village and neighborhood up to the national level, while calling on the solidarity of our sister organizations La RedVIDA and the Platform for Public-Community Agreements in the Americas."
"We also pledge to promote Public-Community Agreements in every country; to strengthen public-community water management based on solidarity and non-profit organization; with a vision and focus on economic solidarity; seeking to improve management capabilities based on our own capacities, on our own talents; and through twinning with organizations in other countries, exchanging knowledge, research, training and advice on strengthening institutions and technology."

The resistance in the communities in defense of water as a human right and a public good are aware of local demands and actions. However, they need to transcend towards an international awareness, to find and acknowledge La Red VIDA, the Platform and other sister organizations for mobilization, advocacy and cooperation in defense of this vital liquid. The next steps are to continue working effectively, to develop new proposals from the grassroots in line with the plan, and to create direct twinning agreements through the Platform.

Photographs:
National Conference of Community Water Systems. Cartagena de Indias (top)
National Meeting Community Water Systems (bottom)
Water Workers in the Face of Privatization

A representative case of the defense of water in Latin America is the struggle in Colombia of the workers from the ACUAVALLE S.A. ESP company. This company provides water and sewer pipeline services to 33 municipalities in the Cauca Valley.

It is made up of the municipalities with participation from government entities such as the Departmental Governor and the Autonomous Regional Corporation for the Cauca Valley (CVC). Thanks to the commitment of its membership, the company has positioned itself as a leading regional service provider. It has the third largest potable water coverage in the country and it guarantees resources in municipalities where payment capacity makes access difficult.

In 2002, as a reaction to the wave of privatization resulting from the neoliberal model in Colombia, and in the face of the threat by the World Bank and the national government, the SINTRACUAVALLE union sought to maintain water in public hands. It proposed an alternative management model built on two fundamental pillars: support for the workers and a commitment to an administration that is transparent and efficient.

Unfortunately, as of 2005, the administration of the company did not meet the commitment for an efficient, effective management, leading to conflict in worker-owner relations. Added to the difficulties presented within the company was the growing trend toward privatization. As a result of this situation, SINTRACUAVALLE took on greater
strength and in 2006 began work that was linked to networks such as ISP (International Public Services), Red VIDA and the Committee for the Defense of Water and Life. The latter a non-profit organization made up of environmentalists, indigenous peoples, unions and NGOs which was conceived as a democratic and participatory space in order to have an impact on environmental policy and management.

As part of its strategy for the struggle, SINTRACUAVALLE also encouraged Public-Community Partnerships. In this sense, it carried out work with the public-public ACUAVALLE-CVS association.

After the privatization process (1999-2002) backed by the World Bank, SINTRACUAVALLE assumed the challenge of defending the company so that it remained in public hands, presenting an alternative management model aimed at internal strengthening. It contributed with the review of the Collective Work Agreement that was translated into an administrative reorganization. This project would be geared towards effective administration of finance generated by the company, the possibility of capitalization and credit resources.
Once the process of saving ACUAVA-LLE was begun there was a need to provide funds to protect the assets of more than 350 retired people who did not have the resources to ensure their pension.

It was also necessary to invest in systems of aqueducts and pipelines that had deteriorated over time. A lack of resources to improve these public investments put the company in danger as Law 142 in Colombia can liquidate companies that are not sustainable investments. After an agreement with the Autonomous Regional Corporation of the Cauca Valley, the central government decided to become a partner to give financial and technical support to ACUAVA-LLE.

In November 2003 the capitalization of the entity was consolidated through the link to CVC which obtained a 39 percent stake. CVC’s intervention was not due to the breakdown of ACUAVA-LLE, rather the public-public partnership took place between two state government bodies and the resources that were invested were public.

The agreement made it possible to link an important asset to the operation of the aqueduct and sewer pipeline systems. It guaranteed supply utilizing surplus water thus eliminating significant energy costs from collection in deep wells. Another product of this public partnership was the injection of capital aimed at reorganizing the pension liability. In the future this will liberate part of the resources produced by the operation in order to increase the annual level of investment in the system and better resolve the needs of the communities.
Another Partnership is being developed with the La Sirena community aqueduct, located in the Valle del Cauca on the southwestern periphery of the city of Cali in Colombia. The system provides water and sewage services to 4200 users in local communities. Based on community work, this aqueduct has managed to keep the administration of the resource in the hands of the users.

In order to mitigate the weaknesses in this community model, on June 23 2010, SINTRACUAVALLE signed a pre-agreement with La Sirena. They would explore the possibility of consolidating a Public-Community Agreement initially focused on technical support, putting the knowledge and expertise of the workers from ACUAVALLE S.A. at the disposal of the community.
The pre-agreement establishes that in order to support the improvement of the quality of potable water in the communities of La La Sirena, SINTRA-CUAVALLE will make it possible to analyze water samples in ACUAVALLE laboratories. It also commits engineers to work on finding faults, making suggestions and changes and to providing appropriate advice.

At this time, the APC is in the preparatory phase. For the implementation it requires basic resources that will make it possible to transport, feed and house the technical team that will take part in this project. Once the financial protocols are defined we will move to the signing of the agreement.
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