



*Form presented by the initiative to participate in the Transformative Cities People's Choice Award*

GENERAL INFORMATION	
<b>Location</b>	Petorca Province, Valparaíso region, Chile.
<b>Title of the Transformative Initiative:</b>	Water for All: Rural Drinking Water Systems and campaign against the privatization of the River Petorca
<b>Name of the Organization:</b>	Unión de Agua Potable Rural de la Cuenca del Río Petorca
<b>Type of Organization</b>	Community not-for-profit organization which brings together 24 cooperatives and committees managing rural drinking water systems in the province of Petorca.
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://www.aguaparatodos.cl">www.aguaparatodos.cl</a>
<b>Category and Year:</b>	WATER. 3rd Transformative Cities Award (2020).
STORYTELLING	
<b>Summary</b>	
<p>Our initiative brings together rural community drinking water systems to develop sustainable solutions in response to the water crisis caused by the commodification of water in Chile. Our actions seek to strengthen the organization and use socially appropriate technology to recover water and territory, and we also carry out education work to raise environmental awareness.</p>	
<b>Background and Description of the Problem</b>	
<p>Neoliberalism was introduced in Chile in 1973, privatizing and commodifying various aspects of life. One area is water, with a market-driven model for water management in which the state does not guarantee the human right to water.</p> <p>In parallel with this, the promotion of export-oriented agribusiness led to avocado export businesses being set up in Petorca since the 1990s.</p>	

Commercial law and the expansion of agribusiness – plus the effects of climate change – have caused a water crisis in Petorca, affecting the water supply for human consumption and for ecosystems in general. This situation has provoked a conflict that has reverberated nationally and internationally (eg: reports by DW, The Guardian, Netflix).

In Petorca, responsibility for supplying drinking water to rural communities lies with the rural drinking water committees and cooperatives known as APRs (*Agua Potable Rural*). The APRs try to meet the demand for water with little government support and are self-financing. For as many as 6,236 people in Petorca, their water supply is at risk. Of these, 3,525 are the most vulnerable because their survival is totally dependent on the water delivered by water tankers. The majority of the people affected are women and older people in rural areas.

### **Design and Implementation**

In this context of environmental catastrophe, the Rural Drinking Water Union of the Petorca River Basin was set up in 2014. This not-for-profit organization is an example of local solidarity and unity that seeks to provide the region's inhabitants with water efficiently and when they need it. It promotes and provides training on the proper use of water in school and community settings and is actively present in today's social protests demanding the human right to water, but above all it is a solidarity network that works for the common good.

One of the first actions was to conduct a collective assessment among leaders and members about how they are affected by the problems related to the water crisis and its main causes.

One of the main obstacles has been the stance taken by the central government with regard to the water problem in the area. The government has consistently supported the agribusinesses engaged in corporate farming, disparaging the demands of the community systems calling for their human right to water to be respected. One way of countering this obstacle has been to forge alliances with other institutions that do understand water as a human right and a common good.

Accordingly, we have developed an alliance with the Playa Ancha University. Another relevant actor has been the Office of Water Affairs in the Petorca local government.

One important process was to gradually increase the number of community water systems joining the Union of APRs.

## Results Achieved and Evaluation

Some of the projects carried out:

- a) “Participatory Water Management and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development Systems in the Petorca River Basin” (2014-2016), together with the Playa Ancha University, with funding from the Fondation Assistance International in Lugano, Switzerland.
- b) Municipal Government of Petorca Office of Water Affairs programme of support for APRs.
- c) “Hydrodynamic hub for climate change adaptation in the Petorca river basin”.

With these projects we have been able to do the following:

- Programme to safeguard and protect APR water rights.
- Protection of water sources by establishing restrictions to prevent pollution.
- Treatment, recycling and re-use of waste water, especially grey water.
- Groundwater replenishment, prioritising areas with community water sources.
- Surface, roof and atmospheric water runoff harvesting.
- Participatory monitoring of water quality, through training and providing community water quality kits to APRs.
- Construction of safe water supply networks, with the work done by the APRs in solidarity. Organization of “Minga del agua” community work days whereby the different APRs contribute voluntary work and knowledge to support other APRs that are in a more vulnerable situation to collect and distribute water.
- Water education and culture: increasing community participation in looking after water and using it sustainably. Example: implementation of the “Environmental Education: Water and Climate Change” Programme.

## Political Strategies

We have developed various different political strategies, from dialogue with government authorities, members of congress, the courts, etc., to organizing protests to denounce the crisis we are experiencing.

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support is from the Petorca local government, with which we have reached agreements to support our activities.

We have also forged alliances with universities (Playa Ancha University) to obtain scientific support and gain legitimacy for the work we do.

For the political work of denouncing the privatization of water in Chile and its consequences at the national and international level, we have forged alliances with socio-environmental movements such as MODATIMA (movement for the defence of water, land and the environment).

Finally, we have organized marches and road blocks at the most critical times of water shortage, to show our desperation at seeing our people getting sick and our animals dying because there is no water for them to drink. These radical actions have managed to attract the attention of the media, prompting the authorities to adopt emergency measures.

### **Communication and Cultural Strategies**

Communication about the water problem and the work our organization is doing has been a key strategy in our work. We have partnered with different organizations to produce videos about Petorca and the Union of APRs (see links to the videos in the section on supporting documents).

Another line of work has been to organize activities in schools about the importance of looking after water, such as the “Environmental Education: Water and Climate Change” Programme which we run in different schools around the province.

Another strategy to communicate with young people and the general public has been to organize “Carnivals for water”, involving parades, bands, religious dance groups, etc. Along the same lines, we have organized various “Music festivals for water”.

As far as the mainstream media are concerned, they have started to take an interest in our problem after we used the strategy of denouncing it internationally in media such as DW, The Guardian, Netflix, France Press, etc.:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05oMsK0-jiA>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/17/chilean-villagers-claim-british-appetite-for-avocados-is-draining-region-dry>

<https://finde.latercera.com/series-y-peliculas/rotten-2-netflix-paltas-petorca/>

Since then, there has been a deluge of reports in the national press. However, they always take the approach of describing us as “those poor people with no water”. They never give

priority to reporting on our strength and the actions we have taken to recover water and territory.

Finally, as a way of improving communication within our own communities, we have made use of community media (radio, local newspapers, social media).

### **Resources, Funding and the Transformative Economy**

The Hierro Viejo APR Cooperative has a manager with advanced administration skills, who has encouraged the cooperative's leadership committee to devote time and resources to applying for funding. As a result, funding was obtained from the Office of Water Affairs for the Technical and Solidarity Bank, in addition to the municipal government funds requested to cover travel costs and food for meetings and workshops. Our member systems pay a monthly membership contribution, and cover the cost of materials used in the Technical and Solidarity Bank (materials and tools), thus making it possible to reduce the costs of buying supplies as well as achieving economic empowerment.

Being awarded funding implied learning about accountability and how to explain the results to the funder. It also inspired other member communities to draw up projects. Projects have been carried out to extend the network of drinking water systems, equip the APR committee office, improve the springs to supply water for human consumption, generate clean energy in the treatment plant in La Ñipa, and others of an academic nature which have provided more knowledge and ecological and educational arguments to support the recovery of water for life. The latter were accompanied by the Office of Water Affairs and students of sociology, social work, geography, anthropology and many other disciplines, who are joining in the fight for life.

### **Related Legislation**

As we mentioned, the 1973 coup and the military dictatorship that followed it ushered in an economic model characterized by privatization and commodification. With the backing of the 1980 Constitution and the Water Code passed in 1981, this separated water from the land and turned water into a commodity to be traded in the market. No substantial changes have been made to this legislation since then, only partial solutions such as delivering water to communities in emergency water tankers. As the Union of APRs we have gone to Congress on various occasions to demand a change in the water law, but we have not yet been listened to.

As mentioned earlier, the level of government that has shown the most support has been the municipal level. In fact, the Municipal Government of Petorca created the Office of Water Affairs in response to the water crisis in the area. The office is the first of its kind in the whole of Chile.

## **Ecological Transitions**

We in the Union of APRs understand that in order to recover our water and territory, improving access to water for human beings is not sufficient. We have therefore worked to restore our watershed for all the living beings to which it is home. Our main initiatives have been to replenish groundwater, giving priority to areas with community water sources, and harvesting surface water runoff.

We have also tried to gain a better understanding of the problem of climate change in order to search for strategies to address it. It is for this reason that we are carrying out our “Hydrodynamic hub for climate change adaptation in the Petorca river basin” project, which seeks to help to increase awareness of climate change.

Another action that seeks to achieve greater harmony with nature is the projects in schools on the importance of looking after water, which seek to enable children to become more connected to nature.

Finally, for an ecological transition that is truly just, it is necessary to have community control over natural public goods such as water. This is why we have tried to strengthen our organization as a union of community systems and campaigned for the democratization of water management in Chile. Our experience has been commended in this country as an experience of direct democracy regarding water.

### **Lessons learned**

We learned to publicize our collective initiatives to create and put in practice solidarity-based community solutions, raising their profile by making a video (“Minga del agua”) to demonstrate that unity is strength and inspire other communities to undertake similar actions so that they can have water in their homes.

We learned to focus our efforts, prioritising our water working groups and activities in self-managed communities with no government support and suffering from the shortage of water due to inadequate infrastructure. This was taken on board by the public service, acknowledging the segregation and lack of a service from the government.

Unity is strength and empowering ourselves will be the way to raise the voice of rural communities. To do this, we know that we can and must carry out projects to learn and train ourselves to use today’s technologies to publicize our actions, needs and knowledge and participate in public consultations.

### **Conclusion**

One of the main challenges is to achieve unity between the drinking water committees in the situation of being deprived of water, which tends to lead to despair in our communities. Ensuring that there is a water supply has enabled us to give ourselves a future, showing that it is possible to remain in our territory and build a dignified life.

We have managed to create an organization that did not exist in our territory: the Union of Rural Drinking Water Committees in the whole Petorca river basin (this is also an experience without precedent in Chile).

In addition, by taking concrete action to improve community water systems, we have improved the quality of life of Petorca’s families, through increased access to drinking water.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### Supporting documents

**“Water for All” - Petorca Community and UPLA working together:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tThtucoJxY>

**“Water for All” - Interview with community leader Álvaro Escobar:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZECT7srTGzM>

**Report on the “Minga del Agua” community work days**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOaz01o-z9A&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOaz01o-z9A&feature=emb_logo)

**“Petorca: Cuando el río suena” – Documentary on the problems with water and local actions in response**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPnqk-PyFC8PETORCA>

**Deutsche Welle report on the water crisis in Petorca:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWqUSGJg1eU> (Spanish)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05oMsK0-ijA> (English)

### Impact of the Covid-19 outbreak

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation in our region. With the pandemic, the environmental disaster has become more relevant than ever: many people living in rural areas are unable to practise correct handwashing and the drinking water they receive from the emergency water tankers is of very poor quality. This precarious access to water makes us less able to cope with the pandemic, and there have been several cases of infection in the province. This has led to complaints of human rights violations being lodged with the National Human Rights Institute, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.