



## Interdisciplinary research and capacity building program on water policies and water management in Andean countries

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This is a mini paper that describes the network of Andean institutions which cooperate in Concertación and other water-related programmes. After a general description of the network, we answer a set of questions about its modalities of knowledge generation, applied and academic research, capacity building and policy advocacy, which are central to this initiative and to the conference more in general.

### **1. The Concertación programme and its extended institutional network**

Concertación is an interdisciplinary research, capacity building and policy advocacy network and programme that aims to improve the water- and livelihood security of peasant and indigenous water management in the Andes. This will be done through the development and support of democratic, equitable and sustainable water management policies and practices. Concertación is a cooperation between Dutch and Andean institutions (Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia).

The urgency of the water problem is well recognized in the Andes. New water policies try to respond to the water management challenges. These have been and continue to be highly debated because of diverging visions, objectives and strategies of the different water use sectors and water use groups.

One of the central issues in the debate is the effect these new policies have on the water access security of the Andean communities and organizations, especially those of the farmers, indigenous peoples and other groups of low economic resources that depend on water for their livelihoods. The present distribution of water and decision making power over water management is characterized by problems of justice, democracy and sustainability.

With special emphasis on the Andean communities, this project pretends to feed the debate over water policies through research, exchange, capacity building and policy advocacy. This will lead to the creation of new responses and proposals of actors at local, regional and national level. These actors will participate in the public debate over the present water policies with the purpose to

develop water management strategies and policies that are effective, equitable, democratic and adapted to the local context.

The strategy of the project is to:

1. Educate practitioners in order to establish a shared network of water professionals in the Andean countries.
2. Develop innovative academic research and stimulate social learning processes in the development and management of water resources.
3. Develop a knowledge and knowledge exchange platform on sustainable and equitable water resource development and management.

By comparing concrete experiences in water management and stimulating exchange and learning at an Inter-Andean level, Concertación aims to have an added value, both for policy and practice. This will be done together with actors and platforms at local, regional and international level.

The central themes of the project are:

1. Legal pluralism, water management and recognition policies
2. Local water management and the strengthening of authorities and organizations
3. Integrated management of water in river basins
4. Regional and international policies for integrated water management

All of these four main themes have several sub-themes. These sub-themes are used to organise research, capacity building, and policy advocacy activities around in the Andes. For example, the collective water rights was one of the main themes for 2007. The collective rights of indigenous and peasant communities to water are under threat by the individualization of water rights, which increases the importance of the recognition of these rights in policy and law making processes. For 2008 we have identified the sub-themes of 'local irrigation systems, their productivity and agrarian dynamics' and the 'feminisation of water management'. Special knowledge teams are formed with expertise on these particular topics and they formulate a knowledge project. The idea is that this knowledge project entails three steps: 1) action-research on the current state of affairs and problems in actual water management regarding this topic. The research findings have to be translated into 2) the improvement of capacity building efforts and subsequently in 3) advocacy and networking activities to improve water policy and water law.

The programme is financed by the Dutch government and the network is constituted by a large number of Dutch and Andean partners that are active in the field of water management for marginalised groups. Our Andean network is coordinated by one institution in every country: in Peru the Institute for the Promotion of Water Management (IPROGA), in Ecuador the Inter-institutional Consortium for Capacity Building on the Sustainable Management of Renewable Natural Resources (CAMAREN) and in Bolivia, the Andean Centre for Water Management and Use (Centro AGUA). The lead partner/network coordinator in the Netherlands is the Irrigation and Water Engineering Group (IWE) of the Wageningen University, which cooperates intensively with the Centre for Studies and Documentation on Latin American (CEDLA) of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). The counterparts with whom the coordinating institutions work form a much larger group of participants composed of organizations, institutes, platforms and networks at local, national and international level. Among the international associates are UN/CEPAL; CapNet/LA WETnet; CONDESAN, SNV, UNESCO-IHE, Waternet in Africa and Crossing Boundaries in South Asia.

## **2. Questions about knowledge generation, capacity building and policy advocacy**

*- Which modalities exist to ensure that local/regional demand for knowledge on specific topics that are important for local/regional policy, are delivered to the right researchers, receives financing and subsequently that the results reaches the right places to influence that policy?*

The modality that Concertación uses to link local knowledge demands with regional policy, is an inter-institutional water network in the Andes, which is active in capacity building, research and policy. This network with representations at the regional and national level has prioritized 4 main themes that are central to regional water management practices and policies. Every year we choose to work on one or two sub-themes that are currently debated in the three different countries. For example, in 2007, the InterAndean network selected the theme of ‘collective water rights’. These collective rights to water are increasingly under threat by the individualization of water rights in the Andes, which shows the importance of the recognition and defence of these rights in policy and law making processes. Around these themes, special knowledge teams are formed. These knowledge teams are made up of Andean water specialists from connected institutions that know the specific regional water problematic and design a comparative knowledge project. International expertise may be called in at this point. The actual field research is carried out by giving five months fellowships to recognised or promising researchers and water professionals who often have problems getting their research financed or require training on the job. The action-research is initiated with a base-study by a regional or international expert on the research theme in question, who can also safeguard the quality of the final products.

A knowledge project entails three steps: 1) action-research on the current state of affairs and problems in actual water management regarding this topic. The research findings then have to be translated into 2) the improvement of capacity building efforts and subsequently in 3) advocacy and networking activities to improve water policy and water law. In this way and together with national water debate and training platforms, the results of such action-based studies can be translated into proposals, methodologies and actions to improve water legislation and policies.

To complement the picture of this modality, we have to mention a set of related research and capacity building initiatives on which Concertación builds. First, several Concertación partners have joined to cooperate in capacity building on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). This has led to the organization of tailor-made courses financed by NUFFIC for a mass of promising mid-career professionals who are expected to become influential in water policy. In Ecuador and Peru these courses are delivering their first results and Bolivia will follow. This creates a base of professionals that contribute to regional Concertación research and policy advocacy initiatives. Concertación finds in these courses a natural vessel for the translation of research to capacity building efforts and in the longer term creates a critical mass for policy advocacy.

Second, Concertación benefits from its support to the continuation of ‘Water Law and Indigenous Rights’ (WALIR). This program works towards the recognition of indigenous and local water rights and management rules in national legislation. WALIR attempts to be a kind of think-tank to critically inform debates on indigenous and customary rights in water legislation and water policy. Over the past 5 years, WALIR has educated a stream of young water professionals who will occupy important positions in the water management and policy frameworks of the near future. These up-and-coming professionals are activated through research grants that contribute to the central and regionally relevant Concertación themes. The most promising of these researchers receive a fellowship from Concertación to follow a Masters study especially designed for Concertación at connected Dutch universities. This has the additional benefit of teaching

these students to participate in international policy debates, which are carried out in English and inform these debates with actual studies of the Andean water management practice.

*- What happens to the supposed trade-off between quality of research for research (more fundamental research) and research for development (more applied)? The assumption is that more applied research is of a lower academic calibre with which researchers 'score' less in the publish or perish carousel.*

There exists a trade-off between academic research and action-research for development, which is approached in the following manner. Around the prioritized water themes in Concertación, a diversity of Andean experts is grouped with research, training or practical interests, which work reinforce each other mutually. The products are then targeted to different audiences, from the traditional academic, to professional, policy and lay audiences. An Andean publication line is foreseen that knows three levels of publication, with different exclusivity, accessibility and price: 1) Academic 2) Politicians, policy makers and practitioners and 3) Water users, their leaders and activists. Regional researchers can thus target their publications to different purposes and acquire prestige accordingly. For international researchers, these regional experiences in relation to international water policy debates provide significant opportunities to publish in order not to perish. Further, to guarantee the quality of the publication series, Concertación provides support to the continuation of the regionally much-appreciated WALIR academic series 'Water and Society', and builds on this initiative and experience within Concertación. The same occurs with a series of 'professional publications' in the NUFFIC financed course programmes on IWRM.

Though fundamental research is not the primary objective of the program, the research network, its partners, the local and national study cases, and the different policy processes it is 'embedded in' offer a wealth of data for critical analysis of water policy and intervention processes. Research time (for data analysis at meta-scientific levels), in this sense, is a far greater limitation than the production and availability of research data themselves.

In addition, the question does remain if there should not be place for fundamental research that is not immediately tied to specific practical or policy interests in development. This allows for a more fundamental reflection on what occurs in actual development practices and policy processes and how these relate or not, questions which escape the attention, are not sufficiently instrumental, or are too controversial for development programmes or policy interests to engage in. In this sense, the abolishment of the individual projects of WOTRO is a loss in terms of the diversity of pragmatic and academic perspectives on development policy. Such innovative research will in the current set-up have less chance to be funded by NWO, where development, non-western, interdisciplinary, social science and qualitative perspectives are underrepresented.

*- How can you do research in partnerships (local/regional; north-south; south-south, n-s-s)? Which modalities work and which not?*

As described above Concertación has opted for doing research in regional teams of Andean experts with additional international expertise. We believe this leads to the identification of relevant water problems, the execution of necessary research, whilst at the same time training Andean researchers and involving international researchers. The latter can benefit from this by relating these research experiences with international policy or academic debates.

An advantage of the extensive Andean institutional network of Concertación is further that it can also be used for academic purposes and further cross-fertilization. This was the basis under a research proposal: "*Struggling for water security: Social mobilization for the defence of water rights in Peru and Ecuador*" that will be carried out between 2008-2012 and is financed by WOTRO. This research

project that combines academic with action-based research was defined together with local partners who expect to benefit from the insights that will be produced. At the same time, the four PhD's included in this project will be mobilised to contribute their research experiences and expertise in strengthening capacity building initiatives, training courses and Masters programmes of network partners in the region, for example with contributions to the aforementioned tailor-made courses supported by NUFFIC.

For research in partnerships it is vital to have well-established mechanisms to collectively decide about the research agenda, objectives and topics, to discuss and diffuse results, and to collectively engage in the translation process toward policy influencing. Rather than just one-level institutional interaction, these mechanisms need to ensure multi-level involvement, from the grassroots to the research institutes.

*- How can you stimulate capacity building of researchers from the North in an adequate manner?*

Concertación and related initiatives support capacity building in Andean water management in different ways. In the foregoing we have mentioned the fact that a consortium of Dutch and Andean partners (Wageningen University, UNESCO-IHE, IPROGA, CAMAREN amongst others) cooperate in the NUFFIC-financed tailor-made courses on IWRM in Ecuador and Peru. Concertación supports these courses with research grants for local researchers to improve the course content and international expertise to review and deliver contributions to the course programme. Concertación further supports the strengthening of local courses for water professionals and water user leaders and masters courses of network partners. In addition, the programme contains several MSc and PhD scholarships. These are given to promising young researchers who are committed to contribute to the issue of water security for marginal groups within the context of a InterAndean network of institutions. They are trained with the idea to create a base of interdisciplinary scholars who can partake in international policy debates on these issues which are largely in English. For this reason, they are trained in the Netherlands, either in CEDLA or in Wageningen. Both social and technical scientists are trained and interact in a special Concertación MSc. programme.

*- How have research priorities been formulated and on which basis do you finance certain research or not?*

Like described above, the research agenda is composed of four main research themes on which the network has reached consensus. On an annual basis, particular sub-themes are selected on the basis of debates and meetings with those organisations that work at the daily level in the field of water policy and practice. Besides the existing regional and national debates, the international network provides opportunities to add new elements, approaches and concepts to the debate, such as for example a legal pluralism approach and recognition policies/politics in water rights issues, or a critical approach of Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives (MSP's) and conflict resolution methodologies in water management.

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