



UPLA – UNIVERSIDAD PLAYA ANCHA

A participatory system for water management and for the sustainable socio-economic development of the Upper Water Reservoir of the Petorca River in the Valparaíso Region in Chile

The “**Participatory system for water management and for the sustainable socio-economic development of the Upper Water Reservoir of the Petorca River in Chile**” project, managed by UPLA, the Universidad de Playa Ancha, a Chilean state university based in Valparaíso, has contributed to water security in the **Petorca River Reservoir** by proposing a participatory model for the management of the reservoir’s water. This has strengthened the network of 25 Agua Potable Rural - APR (Rural Drinking Water) cooperative organizations and extensions of local citizens’ committees. According to Chilean law, the APR network manages the distribution of drinking water in the rural areas of the country.

In Chile, the whole water management cycle, from collection to distribution, is delegated to private businesses. These companies refer to regulations that outline the areas in which they are obliged to organize the distribution of water for domestic and public use or for productive and commercial activities. The Código de Aguas is the set of laws regarding the use of water resources and although it acknowledges that water is a public good, it underlines that water management must meet the market’s supply and demand criteria.

The United Nations Convention on Climate Change classifies Chile as a highly vulnerable country and indicates areas that are susceptible to erosion, deforestation, draught and desertification, with extremely polluted urban areas and also arid or semi-arid areas.

The Estrategia Nacional de Recursos Hídricos 2012 – 2025 report, published in 2013 by the Chilean Ministry of Public Works, indicates that in the last few years, mainly in the Atacama and La Araucanía regions, there have been such frequent and intense periods of draught that there is serious concern regarding possible consequent irreversible erosion of the soil.

Although this serious and complex situation has definitely become a priority for the Government, the current legislation does not appear to be able to provide the necessary laws to deal with the decrease in water resources and the subsequent environmental risks.

The Valparaiso region presents many vulnerable aspects: 906.943 hectares of land are affected by severe erosion, which represents 73.6% of all the soil. The population of the municipality of Petorca is over 10,000 inhabitants. In the urban area the drinking water is managed by a private company, in the rural area it is managed by the 25 APR network.

THE FAI'S SUPPORT:

The initiative supported by the FAI responded to this situation by laying the foundations **for better management of drinking water in the municipality of Petorca**. The project made it possible to set up **REDAGUA**, a network of the 25 APR of the municipality, a permanent observatory to coordinate, monitor and assess the policies and management of the water resources of the Petorca river reservoir. The project also raised the awareness of the local community with respect to the risks for the environment and the need for an efficient, integrated and inclusive management of the resources. Pilot projects were carried out to improve the management of the water cycle and to develop family farming.

The interest and engagement generated by the project in the many people who took part can be seen by the fact that, thanks to this experience, a new association was set up in 2016 in Valparaiso. The association is called **“Prograssio Desarrollo Sostenible”**, it is listed in the register of organizations operating in the public interest and is a member of the Chilean Association of NGOs, Acción Chile.

Prograssio's members live in **Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, Italy, Albania and Egypt** and they include experts in human development with over thirty years' experience in international cooperation, economists, academics from the Catholic University of Valparaiso and the Federal University of São Paulo, international lawyers, journalists and experts in digital communications. Prograssio's priorities include food safety and sovereignty and rural development in areas at a high social and environmental risk.

Prograssio and the **FAI** set up a new project involving the cattle breeders of the upper part of the Petorca valley, who were identified as the most fragile population of the area because of the environmental degradation and the distressing lack of water in the region.