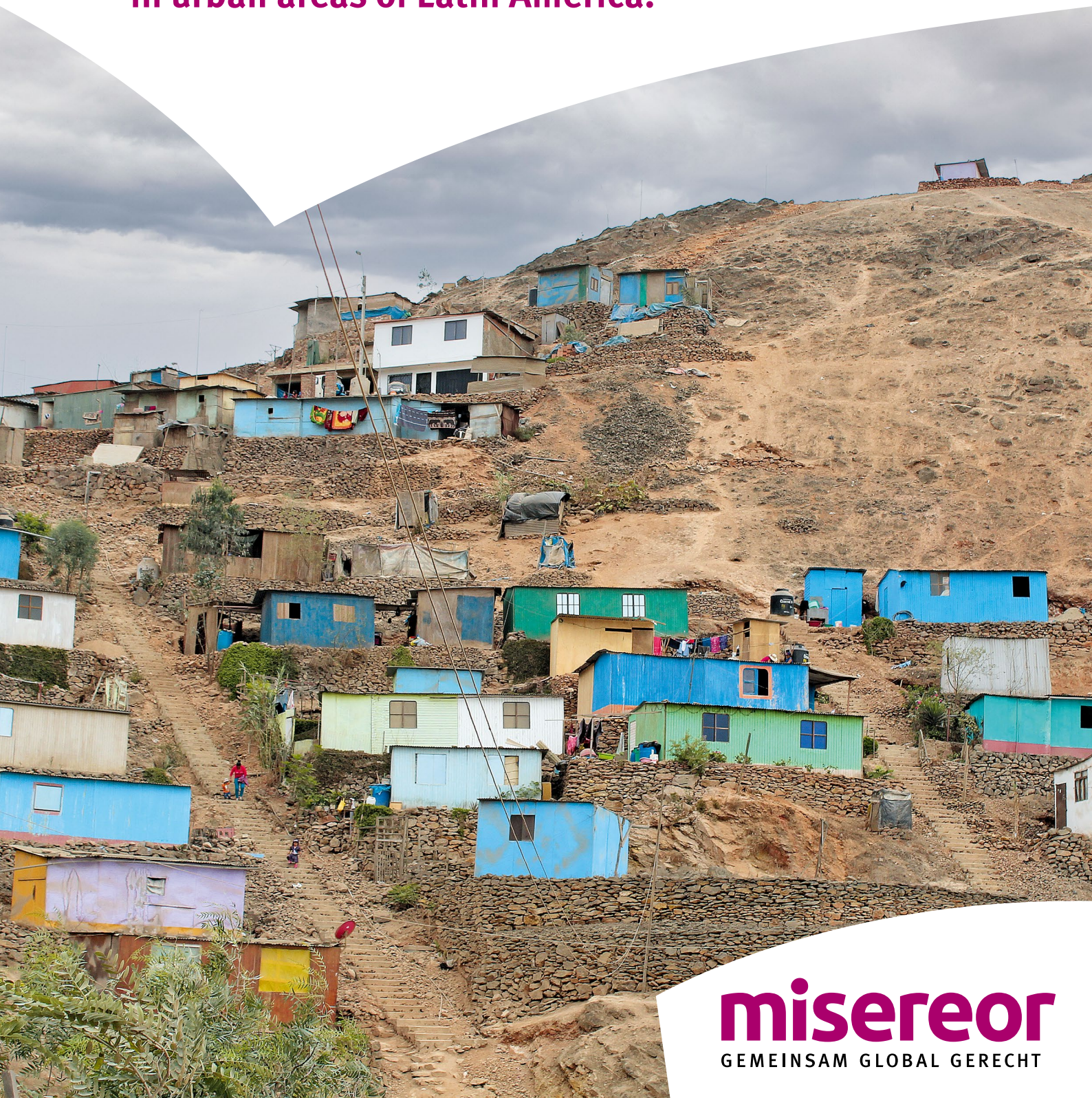


SUMMARY

CLIMATE JUSTICE AND THE RIGHT TO WATER

**Inspiring experiences of adaptation
in urban areas of Latin America.**



The long road ahead to guaranteeing the rights to water and sanitation in Latin America

Access to water and sanitation is a human right, vital to the dignity of all people (UN, 2002). Although this right is recognized in the Constitutions of many countries, we are still far from fulfilling it, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, where service gaps remain very wide: 161 million people do not have adequate access to safe drinking water and 431 million do not have access to safely managed sanitation (ECLAC, 2022). With more than 80% of the population

living in urban areas on the subcontinent, the major issues with water supply and management of water and sanitation services are concentrated in cities, particularly in informal settlements and poverty belts on the periphery where it has been most challenging to provide

services of acceptable quality (WWAP, 2019). Water-stressed conditions, which the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate catastrophe are increasing, have a direct impact on the quality of life and development chances of people living in these areas, meaning that their rights to water and sanitation are not secured.

The official water and sanitation coverage indicators for Bolivia, El Salvador, Mexico and Peru, and for the cities of La Paz-El Alto, San Salvador, Mexico City and Lima, which form part of this Report, however, do not appear dramatic: for drinking water they range from a low of

84% (Bolivia) to a high of 97% (El Salvador) nationally; and, in cities, they range from a low of 92% (San Salvador) to a high of 99.7% (El Alto). These figures, however, do not describe the reality of services in many disadvantaged urban settlements: official data generally show the extent of pipelines laid and do not reflect access to sufficient, continuous, affordable, and quality water. Moreover, limited information on human settlements in the region undermines the credibility of indicators and comparability

In the neighbourhood of San José Obrero, Xochimilco, Mexico City, people without connection to drinking water system accumulate water in drums



across contexts: it is estimated, for example, that actual service coverage could be 15-20% lower for water and 20-40% lower for sanitation (Gil, 2019).

These figures reveal that - in the region - there is still a long way to go to achieve the universality of rights to water and sanitation. The 2030 Agenda - in particular SDGs 6, 11 and 13 - and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) include a mandate to prioritize universal coverage of services for the most vulnerable urban populations while also proposing the need to conserve sources and care for the territories that produce water and receive urban wastewater. The implementation of the NAU Regional Action Plan (RAP), the SDGs and the countries' climate commitments expressed in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) is fundamental to ensuring the path towards universal coverage of services with climate justice.

Climate change is accelerating water insecurity across Latin America, its cities, and urban settlements



Climate change is accelerating water insecurity across the LAC Region, with enormous challenges to securing water in cities. The Sixth Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) points out that Latin America is one of the subcontinents particularly affected by the climate crisis: forward projections reveal that average temperatures are very likely to have increased and will continue to increase at a faster rate than the global average; that average precipitation will change, with increases in the northwest and southeast of South America and decreases in the northeast and southwest; that relative sea levels are very likely to continue to rise faster than the global average in the oceans surrounding Central and South America; and that marine heatwaves will increase throughout the region. Today, we are already feeling the impacts of global warming: the Amazon rainforest and other terrestrial ecosystems have been affected by unprecedented droughts attributed in part to climate change, with consequences for their carbon storage capacity and the distribution of terrestrial species, as well as impacts on agricultural production, urban water scarcity and rationing, and increased migration; sensitive oceanic and coastal ecosystems are losing some of their productive capacity; in the Andes, a loss of between 30% to more than 50% of glacier area has been observed since the 1980s, with impacts on water reserves and availability, while landslides and

floods have increased, as well as the frequency and intensity of fires, with loss of life and infrastructure (IPCC, 2021a).

In the future, impacts are projected to worsen and water scarcity and competition for water resources are anticipated to rise (IPCC, 2021a). Urbanization exacerbates these effects as urban areas alter the water cycle, overexploiting water resources and making soils impermeable. Urban consumption and thirst, as well as how we collect, use, and discard water in urban settings, exacerbates the effects of the climate crisis and has significant energy, environmental, and social implications (Greenpeace Mexico and

Colectivo Agua y Clima CDMX, 2021). The risks of hazards associated with climate change are greatest in low-income settlements where adaptive capacity is limited (IPCC, 2021d) and are already being felt in the four Latin American cities studied:

The impacts of climate change in La Paz-El Alto (Bolivia)

The city of La Paz-El Alto and its metropolitan region are experiencing extreme winds, above-normal precipitation, and increased temperatures (GAML P, 2019). The two cities are in a territory exposed to a high incidence of events such as landslides, landslips, mudflows and floods. Disasters especially affect areas built on unsuitable land, where poor families have spontaneously settled, losing their belongings and even their lives year after year. Floods are occurring on a yearly basis, especially in peri-urban agricultural production areas, damaging crops and farmers'

houses. In relation to water supply, the melting of the Tuni and Condoriri glaciers especially affects the water system that supplies El Alto, while the shrinking of the

Mexico City. Urban consumption and thirst, as well as how we collect, use and discard water in urban settings, exacerbates the effects of the climate crisis and has significant energy, environmental and social implications

Photo: Weichelt/Misereor



Huayna Potosí glacier is likely to affect the hydroelectric plants that meet the demand of the metropolis (Red Hábitat, 2021).

The impacts of climate change in the San Salvador Metropolitan Area (El Salvador)

In the San Salvador Metropolitan Area (AMSS), all climate scenarios indicate that the city will warm substantially - with increases of 1oC to 2oC over the 2021-2050 period and up to +4.5oC by the end of the century - with more episodes of heatwaves and dangers to human health, labour productivity and the public and private economy (CODEMET, 2018). There will also be more extreme rainfall events which, combined with increased deforestation and urban land sealing, will lead to increasingly recurrent and catastrophic floods and landslides (ESSA, 2018). Changes in annual precipitation will lead to a decrease in the volume of accumulated water, reducing its availability for people, animals, agriculture and industry (CODEMET, 2018).



Changes in annual precipitation reduce the availability of water for the population

Photo: FUNDASAL

The impacts of climate change in Mexico City (Mexico)

For Mexico City (CDMX), climate risk analyses point to an increase in temperature, increases in droughts, extreme precipitation, and changes in rainfall patterns (AECOM, 2018). Among the most common disasters associated with climate change are floods, heatwaves, cold spells, storms or atypical rainfall, fires, and droughts (Zambrano, 2021). In the metropolitan area of the Valley of Mexico, the city's flood area is expected to expand by 10% due to extreme rainfall with, at the same time, a reduction in water infiltration to aquifers, with a 13-17% decrease in water availability in the Cutzamala system and other aquifers in the metropolitan area. With a rate of water withdrawal higher than its replenishment, Mexico City is particularly vulnerable to droughts (Government of Mexico City, 2021). People living in the periphery (27% of the population), notably those in the north and east, who are at high climate risk,

lack services, and have unstable housing are most impacted by this circumstance (SEDEMA and C40, 2018).

The impacts of climate change in Lima (Peru)

In the city of Lima, models indicate that there will be a gradual increase in average maximum temperatures up to +2°C by 2045 (MML, 2021). As a desert city with an average

rainfall of less than 500 ml per year, projections show a possible increase in drought and a decrease in water availability for population and other urban uses. Climate change will most affect the poor and vulnerable urban sectors comprising people living on sand hills, steep slopes, ravines, riverbanks, and the coastal-marine fringe (C40, 2019). For these populations, climate risks include mass movements such as rock falls, landslides, and house collapses; heat waves with temperatures above 30°C and a wind chill of at least 38°C (SENHAMI, 2014) with health effects such as fatigue, cramps, sunstroke and

heat stroke; and low temperatures in winter, with a possible increase in acute respiratory infections (ARI).



The new neighbourhoods in the city of Lima have been built on hillsides in the outskirts of the city. Due to their location, the houses are highly vulnerable to the risk of earthquakes and heavy rains.

Photo: DESCO

Immediate policy actions with citizen participation are key to adapting to the impacts of climate change

The poorest populations in all cities, located in unserved informal settlements, require more urgent attention than ever. Ensuring their water security and that of their cities requires decisive and immediate action by governments, with a substantial increase in investment (ECLAC, 2016). It also requires integrating the water, urban development, and climate change agendas, articulating actions between actors and levels of government. Citizen participation is key and, in the vulnerable areas of Latin American cities, organizations and communities are already

mobilizing to adapt to the new contexts and face up to the enormous challenges of the social and climate injustices they are suffering.

Four experiences in urban settlements in Latin America offer reflections and learning that can serve as inspiration and models for change. These inspiring experiences of adaptation show how it is possible to move towards water security.

Citizen participation and use of eco-technologies for climate change adaptation on the slopes of La Paz and El Alto / Red Hábitat

In La Paz and El Alto, the "Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Housing, Neighbourhood and Community Programme" of Red Hábitat shows us the value of technical assistance and knowledge exchange when supporting the adaptation of the most vulnerable urban areas. Using tools such as the "Guide to identifying vulnerabilities in housing, neighbourhoods and communities" (VBC Guide) or the Multi-risk Community Map, Red Hábitat and urban communities build participatory assessments by gathering the knowledge and wisdom of men and women in order to identify hazards and prioritize vulnerabilities, integrating a gender perspective and recognizing the social role that women play in a group or neighbourhood. These contributions make it possible to build proposals for collective intervention for local governments aimed at reducing vulnerability, facing hazards and managing the risks associated with extreme rainfall and floods, drought and water rationing. Neighbourhood and Housing Contingency Plans are also prepared, with proposals for neighbourhood organization in case of emergency and first aid training sessions.



Participatory assessment, complemented with technical data and official statistics available at the neighbourhood level in El Alto

Photo: Red Hábitat

The implementation of "eco-technologies" based on systems that are easy to build, use and maintain allows for the sustainable use of water and renewable energies. These include systems for collecting water from springs and wells as alternative sources to drinking water; harvesting and using rainwater in homes and schools; reusing grey water and using water-saving devices; monitoring water carriers to ensure water quality and reduce speculative water prices; urban agriculture in homes; and using solar energy. Experience shows that, by harvesting rainwater, households can save 40% on

their water bills during the rainy season, while the installation of solar panels can reduce energy bills by up to 37%.

Red Hábitat uses these resources to create a socio-environmental education process that includes the co-construction and socialization of information, the implementation of practical solutions in homes and neighbourhoods, and training through theoretical and practical courses on urgent issues such as climate change in the Bolivian highlands and in La Paz and El Alto, integrated and co-responsible water man-



Ecotechnologies
at the service of
housing and habitat
for rainwater harvest-
ing and use

agement, the legal security of housing provision for its improvement, electricity and basic plumbing, and so on. Since 2020, courses have been held in 17 neighbourhoods with 1,148 people as direct beneficiaries and 2,870 family members as indirect beneficiaries, 82% of whom were

women. The tools can be scaled up and replicated in intermediate cities and other metropolitan regions. The lessons learned have already been used to design useful instruments for public policies, such as the National Guide for the Sustainable Use of Water in Housing, delivered to the Vice-Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the State Housing Agency; the Disaster Risk Management Training Programme and the Vulnerability Identification Guide delivered to the Autonomous Municipal Government of La Paz (GAMLP); and the Water Guide, an educational tool for schools and neighbourhood councils delivered to the Autonomous Municipal Government of El Alto.

Protection of water resources in the face of climate change in San Salvador / FUNDASAL

The cases of the Jiboa River and the Arenal Monserrat micro-watershed

In San Salvador, FUNDASAL is working in the Jiboa river basin and the Arenal Monserrat micro-watershed, organizing communities to change practices that damage the water quality and to implement Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) solutions. FUNDASAL's strategy is based on strengthening community organization and local capacity building. Community interrelations and coordination between actors (villagers, social organizations, academia, municipal governments, specialist institutions) aimed at generating participatory proposals has been a key feature of its interventions.

In the Jiboa river basin, after five years, an inter-communal organization was formed with legal status under the name of the Asociación de Pobladores del Departamento de La Paz (ASOPAZ), which prepared its own Habitat and Environment Attention Plan. Through the Citizen Training School (ESFORCI), training processes were developed for the communities, covering topics such as community organization, community assessments and planning, environmental analysis, information on institutions and their competencies, housing and habitat, among others. From the experience of community practices, participatory proposals were generated to promote legal frameworks in response to housing deficits, integrated water management, as well as municipal ordinances and lawsuits before environmental courts for environmental protection and defence (FUNDASAL, 2011). This participatory dynamic made it feasible to build responses in accordance with diverse housing modalities and varying types of water systems. The crucial element was the establishment of Water Boards to administer water systems and safeguard water resources as a common good.

In the Arenal Monserrat micro-basin, based on a socio-environmental vulnerability assessment, the perceptions of the population of the Urban Popular Settlements (APU) and the effects of climate phenomena within each community were collected (FUNDASAL and City Adapt, 2019). Slums with higher human density, more risk of disaster, and greater potential effect on ecological services were identified as priority sites for offering EbA solutions to minimize urban vulnerability. The measures include interventions



School gardens established with a project by City Adapt / FUNDASAL - UNEP in the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador

Photo: FUNDASAL

at various scales to produce ecosystem services, such as the development of vertical gardens and bio-gardens (at the level of housing), greening of roads or reclamation of vacant land (at the level of neighbourhood), creation of parks and urban forests, or use of spaces along streams and riverbanks (city-watershed level). Up until September 2022, in alliance with educational centres, FUNDASAL was implementing school and community gardens, rain-water harvesting systems, bio-gardens, water systems, reforestation of streams and other Nature-Based Solutions (NBS). Agreements with municipalities have

made it possible to replicate training with new communities and include EbA measures into municipal planning, both of which should be reflected in municipal plans starting in 2023. EbA procedures have demonstrated their efficacy in enhancing soil filtration, water supply, and source protection, among other things. It is now time to scale them up and spread them throughout the basin and other regions.

Promoting a right to water and climate justice agenda in Mexico City / Habitat International Coalition's Latin America Regional Office (HIC-AL)

In response to the water issues in Mexico City, the Habitat International Coalition's Latin America Regional Office for Latin America (HIC-AL) has partnered with the Coalition of Mexican Organizations for the Right to Water (COMDA) and historical social movements such as the Popular Urban Movement (MUP) to influence public policies on water management. This approach is predicated on the idea that Mexico City's problems are not caused by a lack of water but rather by an inequality in the distribution of water. HIC-AL and its allies are critical of the current approach to water management, which prioritizes large infrastructure projects

over the preservation and sustainability of water sources and the surrounding area, and instead allows overuse and pollution of these resources through several concessions given to the real estate, bottling, and extractive industries, even in basins where there is a water shortage.

The first Human Rights Programme of the Federal District (PDHDF) in 2009, which included the right to water and the right to adequate housing, was one of the most emblematic actions taken by HIC-AL and COMDA during their more than 15 years of defending and promoting the human right to water and other rights related to habitat. Joining efforts with other social and political actors, they have also achieved constitutional recognition of the human right to water in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (CPEUM) in 2012 and, years later, its inclusion in the first Political Constitution of Mexico City (2017).

HIC-AL and its allies have engaged in lobbying to advance specific public policies through which to enforce the human right to water, knowing full well that legal recognition of that right is an immensely important but insufficient social achievement in this regard. For example, COMDA played a key role in the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation's visit to Mexico in 2017. The participation of its members in the Working Groups to Assess the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in Mexico City, published in 2021, was an advocacy achievement, complementing the Human Rights Assessment published in 2020, which did not address these rights. More recently, COMDA and HIC-AL joined forces with more than 30 organizations, networks, urban collectives, environmentalists, youth groups and academics, responding to a call from Greenpeace Mexico, to form a civic platform of organizations in Mexico City (CDMX) for the socio-environmental defence of the watershed and the human right to water in the face of the climate emergency (Greenpeace Mexico, 2020). This platform, now called "Colectivo Agua y Clima", has already presented an agenda that promotes a long-term vision and seeks to sustain the continuity of policies in the face of changes in government. During the



Presentation of the "Water and Climate Guide" with Chinampero Women in San Gregorio Atlapulco, Xochimilco (Mexico City)

Photo: Jimena Silva

pandemic, the Collective setup communication, education and advocacy commissions through which press releases were prepared and disseminated, and awareness-raising actions were carried out, such as the "tour of the tap", a tour of the Mexico Valley basin to denounce inequality, real estate voracity, poor water distribution, the devastating effects of the climate emergency, and to propose solutions to save the basin. Educational materials were also produced, such as the "Water and Climate Guide to getting involved in your city", which has been presented in the capital and in other cities such as Oaxaca, Jalisco, Puebla, and Querétaro, thus promoting social dialogue and raising awareness of the water problem and its relation to the climate emergency. The experience of the young "Colectivo Agua y Clima" shows, that in less than a year, a new coordination of civil society efforts has been promoted, increasing awareness of the connection between urban problems, the difficulties of water management, and the climate emergency, and pioneering suggested solutions to water problems in the city from a climate justice approach.

Climate vulnerability and access to water in southern Lima / DESCO

In the city of Lima, between 2018 and 2019, DESCO designed and carried out an Urban-Environmental Survey and promoted a series of urban community dialogues to provide an updated understanding of access to water in eight neighbourhoods of the capital, in the districts of Villa María del Triunfo (VMT), Villa El Salvador (VES) and San Juan de Miraflores (SJM). In coordination with community groups, volunteers, and the Urban Committee for Neighbourhood Environmental Vigilance (CUVAB) made up of neighbourhood leaders, 822 surveys were carried out, ensuring representation for each neighbourhood. The survey's co-design, local training for its creation using an Android application, and data validation through workshops were all parts of the participatory process.

The purpose of the survey was to examine how residents who did or did not have access to public water services felt about the availability, price, quality, and sufficiency of water—conditions that the State is required to ensure. The survey's findings show that neither neighbourhoods with public water systems nor those without have access to adequate water supplies. Neighbourhoods with public networks have summertime water outages and poor service, and the water company neglects to address financial issues, unplanned outages, or failures. Families living in areas without a public net-

work are provided with a lower level of service; they are subject to poor water quality, low availability (less than 50 litres per day), labour-intensive transportation, long wait times for tanker trucks, and a higher risk of developing acute diarrheal diseases (ADEs) due to a lack of quantity and quality of drinking water.

The Survey's findings were organized in a Report and disseminated in open forums and gatherings in the neighbourhoods themselves, providing a fresh interpretation of the urban and environmental situation. They consequently evolved into a tool for increasing knowledge of and developing skills in urban environmental management in areas at risk from climate change.

They were also employed as a tool for advocacy and communication with the government, including forums for citizens with the Congress of the Republic and discussions in Lima, Huancayo, and Arequipa where Urban Environmental Working Groups were established to defend territory and cities. These forums involved territorial actors (population, state, public institutions, civil society, trade unions, professional associations, companies and universities) who came together to formulate urban-environmental agendas from a human settlement perspective.

The Urban Environmental Survey proved to be a simple but effective instrument for information gathering, awareness raising, capacity building, dialogue, and advocacy, in short a co-assessment and co-training tool on water and sanitation services with the community. The survey results also made it possible to commence the "Integrated Sustainable Water System" project, which was selected as the winner of the Latin American, African, and Asian Popular Habitat Service (SELAVIP) call for proposals and is now enabling 126 vulnerable families in four of the report's participating neighbourhoods to have better access to water.



In southern Lima, in neighbourhoods without access to a public water system, families receive a limited quality service with low water availability (less than 50 litres per day)

Photo: DESCO

We can wait no longer: the agenda to guarantee the right to water must move faster

Recognizing the enormous disparities and social vulnerabilities in Latin American cities' informal settlements, and reminding all participants that the right to water and sanitation is a universal right that is also enshrined in the New Urban Agenda's Regional Action Plan and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (NAU) (ECLAC, 2019), the organizations and communities co-authoring this Report hereby adopt the five key calls of the HIC Voices of Habitat Manifesto for: 1. Deep economic redistribution. 2. Recognition of differences and invisibilities. 3. Parity in political participation. 4. Habitat for human rights, not war. 5. Mutual care, solidarity, and social responsibility,

and we demand the following from national and local governments:

1. **Strengthen public policies on climate change from a comprehensive perspective in cities and urban settlements, based in human rights** and ensuring effective citizen participation through improved coordination and articulation of actors for the development, implementation, monitoring, and follow-up of our countries' climate agendas.
2. **Strengthen urban development policies and urban planning**, ensuring better sectoral public policy alignment and coordination between government agencies, and encouraging the integration of urban and rural development, securing ecological sustainability, housing security, economic security, and energy security.
3. **Implement water management policies from a rights-based approach and a gender and intergenerational perspective** on access to services, considering the principles of equity, availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, and sustainability. In addition, integrate local knowledge and the community approach to water management and promote the participation and strengthening of the capacities of women in the design and implementation of water management policies.
4. **Give top priority to building and enhancing water distribution and sanitation infrastructure in the most vulnerable areas**, promoting community involvement for equitable distribution of high-quality water, allocating more money for investment in culturally-appropriate infrastructure, and ensuring effective citizen oversight of budgets and investments.

5. **Strengthen food policies with a focus on food security and sovereignty**, recognizing that climate change directly affects water sources and increases the incidence of disasters, indirectly affecting food production and distribution.

6. **Improve urban water governance**, ensuring decision-making in water administration from local management and local boards and strengthening effective mechanisms for citizen participation and advocacy in policy design and decision-making on water resources.

7. **Defend the common goods, including the ecosystems, natural resources and water recharge areas on which cities depend.** Plans for the protection, conservation, and restoration of water sources must be prioritized, while the development and conservation of rural areas adjacent to cities and protected land in cities must receive special attention.

8. **Implement adaptive technologies that are based on the ancestral knowledge of Indigenous Peoples**, such as: planting and harvesting water in rural and urban areas; reuse and recycling of water and wastewater; conservation of ecosystems for the protection of water sources; use of solar energy to reduce household expenditure; urban, vertical, rooftop and backyard gardens for home consumption and food security; watershed forestation.

9. **Clean up our rivers, lakes and lagoons**, reduce pollution of water sources and encourage habit changes for the safe and effective use of water through tighter regulation and oversight of private sector operations, particularly agribusiness and real estate, a review of the "polluter pays" principle, and water recycling.

10. **Strengthen organized civil society's capacities for disaster prevention and climate change adaptation**, facilitating access to safe land, prioritizing infrastructure and programmes for safe and sustainable social housing, putting in place early warning systems based on community input and safeguarding those areas most susceptible to landslides and floods.



Neighbourhood assembly in El Alto (Bolivia)

Photo: Red Hábitat

We also call on the international community to

1. **Increase countries' ambition** to tackle climate change, including stopping the extraction and use of fossil fuels as well as massive deforestation and the preservation of ecological sinks.
2. Recognize that **international climate policies must respect human rights and the rights of Mother Earth/Nature/Pachamama**.
3. Give **priority attention to the most vulnerable populations** and, in particular, empower women who are key actors.
4. Adopt **special measures for areas that are particularly sensitive to climate change**, such as the Central American dry corridor, one of the world's most vulnerable regions.
5. Ensure that civil society, particularly **vulnerable communities as subjects of rights, actively participates in United Nations Climate Change Conferences**.
6. Promote a **stronger dialogue between nations of the global South and North**, an exchange of knowledge, the sharing of solutions, including those derived from ancestral knowledge, and the advancement of research on the relationship between housing, habitat, cities, climate change, and water.
7. Establish **global networks of community-based organizations** for the sharing of information and development of adaptation solutions based on local knowledge.
8. **Increase and prioritize financial resources for climate change adaptation** and international development cooperation for investments in water and sanitation infrastructure, and improve funding mechanisms, access and transparency, particularly at the local level (civil society and local governments) where more and better social control can be exercised.
9. Ensure **direct access for NGOs and municipalities to climate finance funds**.
10. Establish mechanisms and **public funds to address loss and damages** (for those cases where it is not possible to adapt to climate change impacts).

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