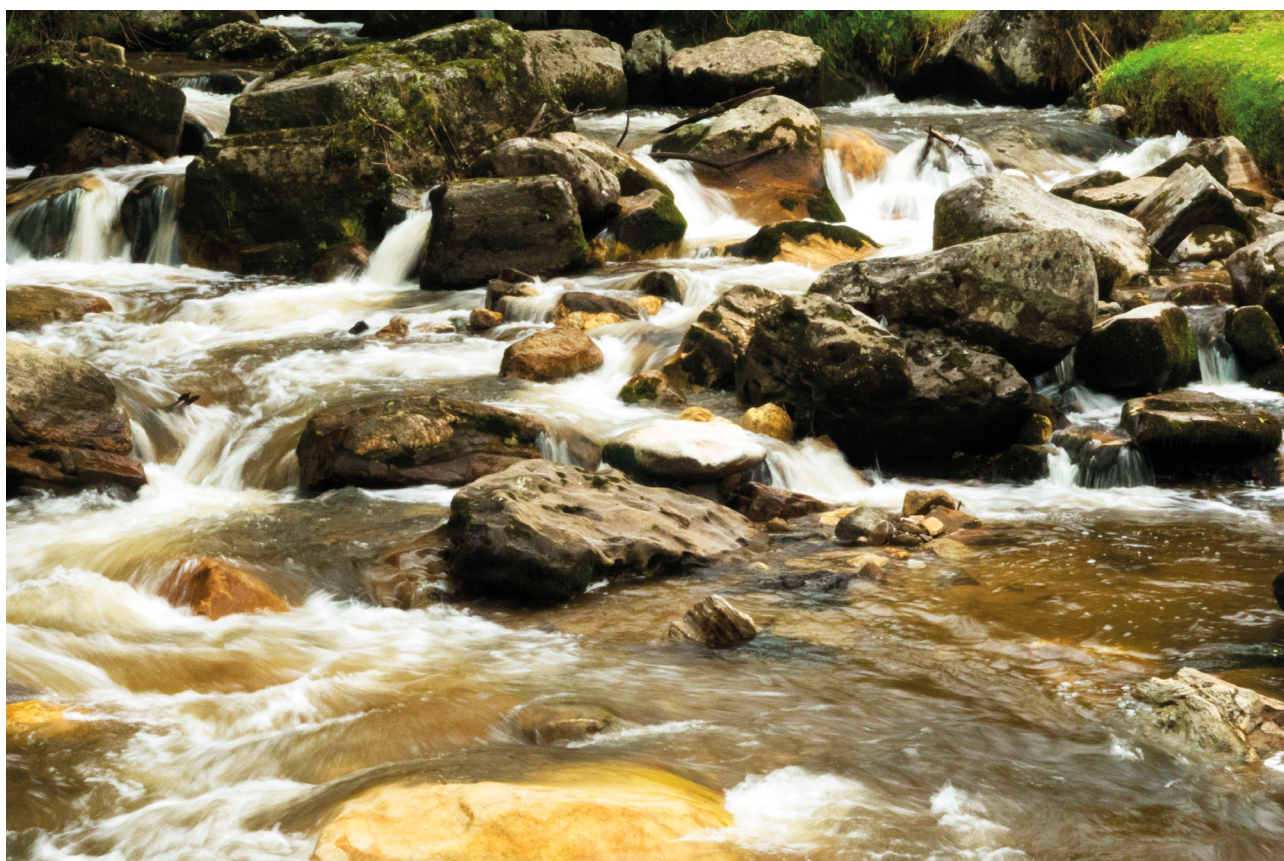


EL AGUA NOS UNE – SUIZAGUA LATIN AMERICA

2016-2021

**Processes, success factors and challenges
of the SDC's water management project
in Latin America**

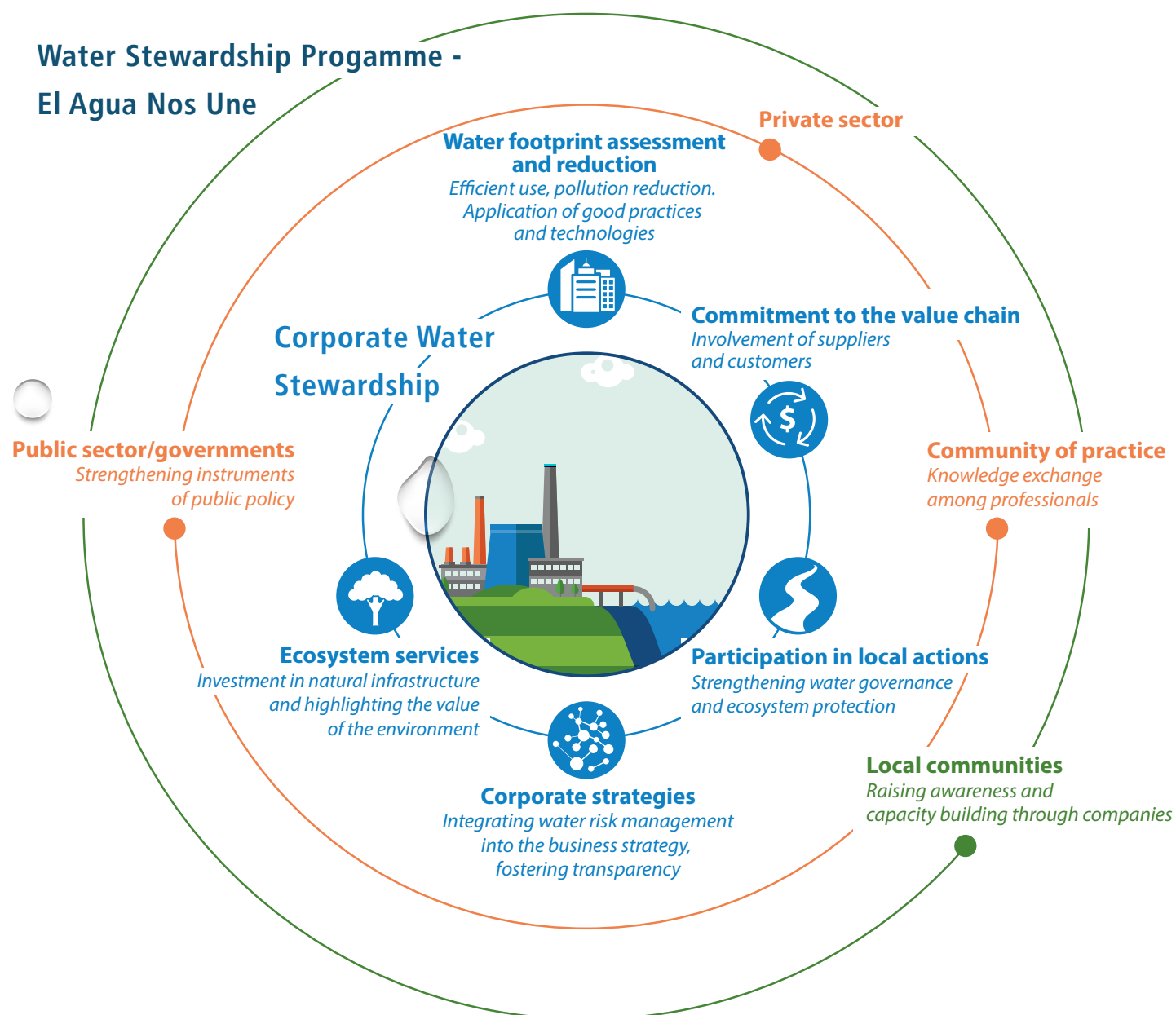


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KEY FACTS

El Agua Nos Une (Water Unites Us), until 2017 known as SuizAgua, is a public-private partnership initiative in Colombia, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Mexico that identifies and tackles water-related risks for production processes. Using the International Standard ISO 14046, it works to assess and identify actions to reduce the water footprint of companies and to engage them in collective actions to improve water management at the water basin level. It does so by motivating businesses to improve their water management through corporate water stewardship. Further, El Agua Nos Une facilitates a Latin American community of practice on water issues. It also supports the preservation of key ecosystems as well as the implementation of public policies set to monitor and improve water efficiency and control of water pollutants.



Corporate water stewardship

Corporate water stewardship is an approach that sees sustainable water management as a company's social and environmental responsibility as well as a business strategy to reduce water-related risks. It seeks to lower their impacts and drive innovation while remaining competitive. Corporate water stewardship includes the assessment and reduction of water footprints within companies and value chain processes and the implementation and monitoring of collective actions onsite.

Water footprint (ISO 14046)

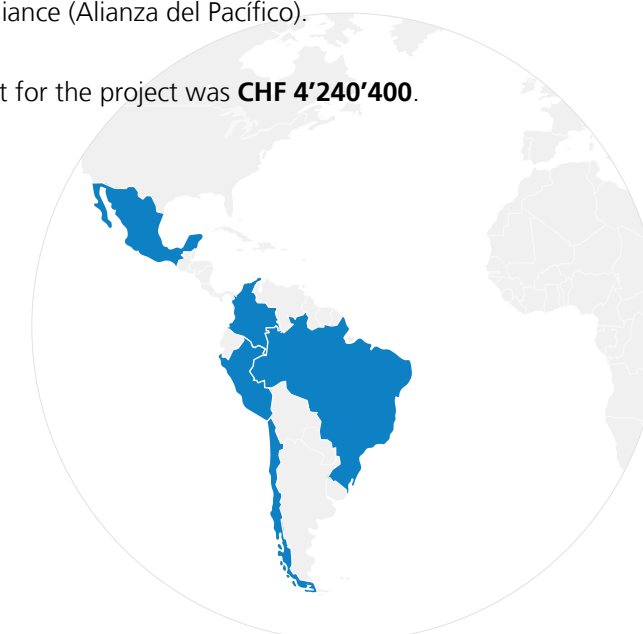
Water footprinting is a way of assessing water use (water consumed or polluted) and potential environmental impacts related to its use in the transformation/production of goods and services through each step of the life cycle. It includes water use for the extraction of raw materials, transportation, transformation, commercialization, reuse and disposal. Water footprinting, as defined under ISO 14046 by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), can either be done as a stand-alone assessment, where only potential environmental impacts related to water are assessed, or as part of a complete life cycle assessment, where consideration is given to all potential environmental impacts.

→ Video illustrating the value of water: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1omzKqalRU>

El Agua Nos Une is an initiative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's (SDC) Global Programme Water. It is implemented in partnership with **private companies** in Latin America, public institutions in **Colombia, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Mexico, local communities, civil organizations** and **environmental consultants**. While activities started in Colombia in 2010, this text focuses on its last implementation phase from **2016 to 2021**. From 2021 onwards, El Agua Nos Une continues under a new four-year programme with the same name.

The project aims at strengthening evidence-based decision-making for better water governance in Latin America. It envisions systemic change towards corporate water use efficiency and pollution mitigation, while mobilizing stakeholders for responsible water use and ecosystem preservation. It is closely connected to global and regional frameworks, such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the OECD Declaration on Green Growth and the Pacific Alliance (Alianza del Pacífico).

For the period from 2016 to 2021, SDC's budget for the project was **CHF 4'240'400**.



Success in numbers – private sector achievements in the field of responsible and committed water management between 2016 and 2021

- Budget of **CHF 4'240'400** for the time between 2016 to 2021

- **65 private companies** from different productive sectors involved



- **A reported CHF 26,4 million** invested by companies in good practices, technologies and collective actions



- › **6,8 million m³ of water saved**, which is equivalent to the annual domestic water use of 150'000 people



- › **14'330 people** involved in **24 collective actions** developed by companies



Background

For the last decade, Switzerland has been a pioneer in introducing the concept and practice of corporate water stewardship in Latin America. The region faces many water-related challenges, such as floods, water stress, a growing water demand, low-efficiency rates and deficient wastewater treatment (less than 50%). These problems are aggravated by climate change and precarious environmental and human rights situations, particularly in Colombia but also in Brazil and Mexico.

Moreover, the global issue of increasing environmental and social impacts through excessive production and the worldwide distribution of goods and services affects local water security as well. Thus, evidence-based decision-making and cooperation between regional and local actors is imperative to improve humans' and nature's well-being overall.

The private sector is becoming more aware of water-related risks concerning them and citizens are demanding more transparency and engagement in reducing their impacts.

COOPERATING WITH DIFFERENT SECTORS

El Agua Nos Une's cooperation with the Private Sector

Originating in Colombia, and only later adapted to different country contexts, the initiative was developed out of the private sector's concerns regarding risks to water quality. Driving factors for cooperation were the novelty of partnering with Switzerland and the added value for companies gaining a new perspective on how to manage water. While, due to differences in water policies, private sector engagements, local communities' voices, etc., there is no one pattern that fits all countries and activities of El Agua Nos Une, certain simplifications can be made when it comes to process implementation.

Processes

- Technical advice to companies on water footprint assessment methodology (ISO 14046) is provided by the SDC to push towards a more responsible water use and management in businesses. The SDC is hereby helped by specialized partners on cleaner production, life-cycle assessments and environmental footprints.
- Data collection and capacity building of employees to implement water footprinting is assured by companies. They invest in reducing their impacts (consumption and pollution).
- A Latin American community of practice, which consists of private sector representatives, government officials, NGO experts and academia, is organized by the SDC. It ensures knowledge management as well as exchange and visibility of good practices, technologies and collective actions with the goal to develop a common understanding of the problems and solutions among practitioners and to ensure a horizontal way of learning across contexts and countries.

Colombia



Peru



EXAMPLES ►► Improvements in water management by participating companies

- **11% less water extracted per ton of paper** in the pulp, paper and cardboard industry in 2019 compared to 2017, which is a reduction of 1,912,549 m³ per year.
- **108'138 m³ of water per year saved** by the cement manufacturing company Cementos Argos through the implementation of an ultrasonic measurement system in their plant that helps measure water consumption and allows for faster decision-making.
- **3302 m³ of water per year reduced** by Orazul Energy Peru by installing dual flush toilets in their offices – toilets with two buttons that flush different amounts of water depending on needs.


→ More examples can be found in the regional 'El Agua Nos Une' publication on the corporate water stewardship initiative:
<https://www.waterunitesus.org/knowledge-management/regional-publication/>

El Agua Nos Une’s cooperation with Governments


Working together with the public sector to improve water management and strengthen public policy on water-related issues is crucial and needs to complement work with the private sector. This can happen in many different forms.

Processes

- ▶ Interest in the work done with the private sector has led to partnerships with Government departments, for example the Colombian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies of Colombia (IDEAM), the National Water Authority of Peru (ANA) and the National Water Commission of Mexico (CONAGUA), among others.
- ▶ Diverse entry points, such as the opportunity to support water monitoring systems or the creation of voluntary schemes, led to different types of collaboration in different countries.



Colombia



Chile & Peru

Other

EXAMPLES ▶▶ Policy implementation/developments at country- and regional-levels

- **Development of the National Water Study in 2018** (carried out every 4 years) and a local **Water Monitoring Programme** (PIRMA), both with the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies of Colombia (IDEAM) and other public partners.
- Support for the creation of the Blue Certificate, a voluntary scheme for corporate water stewardship that works similarly to the Peruvian Carbon Certificates.
- **28 companies** have assumed voluntary commitments with the Peruvian Government to reduce the water footprint in their production processes.
- **11 companies** have achieved their commitments and were awarded the Blue Certificate.
- The Blue Certificate scheme was further adapted for Chile and launched under the Clean Production Agreements framework in 2021.
- In Brazil and Colombia, El Agua Nos Une strengthens the link with the **UN’s Global Compact initiative on corporate** sustainability known as the CEO Water Mandate.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

1 Strong participation and broad alliances

Involving actors from within companies, public institutions, local organizations, communities and intergovernmental organizations has led to a big network of participating actors and allies. An example of this is the direct link established with the Pacific Alliance thanks to the joint work with the Colombian

National Business Association, the Colombian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and the Peruvian National Water Authority.

2 Technical expertise


Private companies and governmental institutions benefited from technical expertise and measurable, comparable data indicators, which, next to quality, also lend legitimacy to the programme.

El Agua Nos Une’s cooperation with Local Communities


The programme aims at strengthening good water governance. Thus, in Chile, Colombia and Peru it has been encouraging exchange and joint actions between the private sector and local communities by motivating companies to engage with civil society and invest in local projects.

Processes

- ▶ Collective actions, such as restoring water provider ecosystems, improving local agricultural production, enhancing access to water, etc., are supported by the SDC and companies.
- ▶ Design and implementation of responsible consumption campaigns, motivation of youth and women to take action, and capacity-building workshops reduce water consumption and strengthen local entrepreneurship.



Colombia



Chile & Peru

EXAMPLES ▶▶ Change generated in the region

- **2,765 hectares planted with native species and 744 m³ rainwater harvested** through collective, external actions organized by companies belonging to El Agua Nos Une.
- **541 families engaged in the ecosystem services investment scheme ‘miPáramo’** - a public-private-community initiative for the conservation of the high Andean Forest and high-altitude wetland ecosystems, which is based on voluntary agreements by farming families.
- Youth campaign on responsible consumption of goods and services supported.
- Launch of **campaigns on the topic of responsible water consumption** for high school and university students.

3 Right balance between structure and flexibility

Setting clear objectives and adaptation to local contexts through consistency in work and leadership as well as through maintaining flexibility proved key for a good collaboration with all actors.

4 Knowledge sharing

Creation of a community of practice to circulate information, which is especially important on a regional level. Formats used to disseminate knowledge include events, online courses, workshops, webinars, videos, guides, guidelines, social media campaigns, newsletters and a website.

5 ‘Swissness’

The SDC’s vision, position and neutrality function were important elements to generate interest among Latin American players. Through El Agua Nos Une trust and long-lasting collaborations with different actors were built over the last decade.

MAIN CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Lack of national water policy implementation and adaptation of law

There is a clear lack of implementation and sound command and control of regulations for water use efficiency and pollution control. Low water tariffs, for example, are a disincentive to investment in leakage control, water reuse, rainwater harvesting, etc.

Additionally, soft laws (e.g. principles, codes of practice, public recognition) and recognized standards that could improve engagement from the private sector, motivating dialogues and lead to strategic water reforms are missing.

- Promote the analysis of existing water policies to reveal bottlenecks as well as good practices.
- Develop incentives for companies that go beyond policy compliance or tax reduction and further technologies that improve water use.
- Provide standardized assessments that lead to comprehensive ecolabels or company recognition of environmental performance.

2 Companies neglect investment in environmental management and local production due to global production chains

Companies' interest in environmental management and investments in local engagements is limited due to easily attainable, often cheap, products and services from around the world.

The main economic investments by companies only concentrate on direct operations, such as wastewater treatment technologies, water reuse, water saving devices, LED lighting, equipment and motors with lower energy consumption and good practices. There is a need to expand to the value chain.

- Highlight and communicate good practices, technologies and examples of return on investments. If possible, focus on peer-to-peer learning in order to raise awareness among companies.
- Where feasible, communicate with the whole value chain from suppliers to clients. This helps ensure environmental management of the product or services as whole.
- Support business associations in encouraging companies from different sectors to work together on sustainable production processes and economy of scale.

3 Lacking awareness of water-related issues by civil society and corporate entities

Civil society's awareness of its capacity to influence the reduction of water related impacts, in particular related to the consumption of goods and services, is limited. Advertising often guides consumer choices when it comes to buying products.

Products and service prices do not include the externalities, such as the cost of social and environmental impacts.

- Build capacity on water footprinting in civil society. Provide arguments, informed solutions and alternatives for a more sustainable lifestyle and better decision-making when it comes to consumption.
- Support transparency and disclosure of environmental impacts of production processes and monitoring through multi-stakeholder platforms.

4 Lack of standardized procedures for environmental footprint calculation and communication

Several elements need to be considered when interpreting the results of footprinting, such as scope (temporal and geographical), inventory data, results (potential impacts vs measured impacts) and overall sustainability.

Lack of standardized and common methodologies leaves space for environmental self-reporting, unfortunately, in some cases, linked to green washing.

Lack of clear communication of environmental impacts causes difficulties in engaging civil society.

- Standardize methodological guidance of environmental footprint calculation and improve data quality.
- Build and share knowledge on water footprinting.
- Strengthen leadership from private, public and civil society to provide guidance among peers.