

Forging accountability in water governance ‘from below’

Lessons from grassroots organizations in Ecuador and Peru

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Introduction

- It is evident that transparency and accountability are needed as means to improve water governance mechanisms.
- Internationally much attention has been given to establishing mechanisms for “user” participation as a means of increasing transparency and accountability.



Introduction

- But how to bring this about is still the big question...
 - Downsizing and decentralization of governments?
 - Greater participation of non-state actors in water governance?
 - Multi-stakeholder platforms?
 - Legal mechanisms?...
- Including and defending the interests of the poor and marginalized in this context remains to be one of the biggest challenges!



Water governance?

- We depart from the conception that water governance is:
 - ... politically contested (there are great stakes at play)
 - ... formed through many centres of authority and control that have different power positions (polycentricity)
- ... it reflects and projects economic and political power through design, manipulation and control of water related processes.



Water governance?

- In this context it becomes relevant to ask:
 - Who holds who accountable for what?
 - What is the role of transparency for accountability?
- Our concern has revolved around the following question: How do peasant and indigenous communities in the Andes hold the state authorities and other stakeholders accountable in water governance?



Case 1: Water user federations Ecuador





INTERJUNTAS-CHIMBORAZO



Comunidad San Antonio de las...
PRESENTE

JUNTA GENERAL DE LA COMUNIDAD
DEL SISTEMA
DEL CITADO ESTABLECIMIENTO
MULTITUD
POR JUSTICIA

Comunidad San Antonio de las...
PRESENTE
Que vaya sabiendo el Jefe
Podemos el cambio por no
despedirnos, sentencias desde 2001
y por engañar, pedir plata
ser despota, etc...

Interjuntas-Chimborazo

- Demand: transparency and justice in the provincial water administration and water allocation.
 - First dialogues and the formal path... Dead end.
 - Mobilization of 5000 water users ending in the occupation of the provincial water agency for 18 consecutive days.
 - Change of the head and secretary of the provincial Water Agency.
 - Establishment of a public and transparent process for the appointment of the new Director of the Water Agency.
 - Continued monitoring of the performance of the Water Agency.



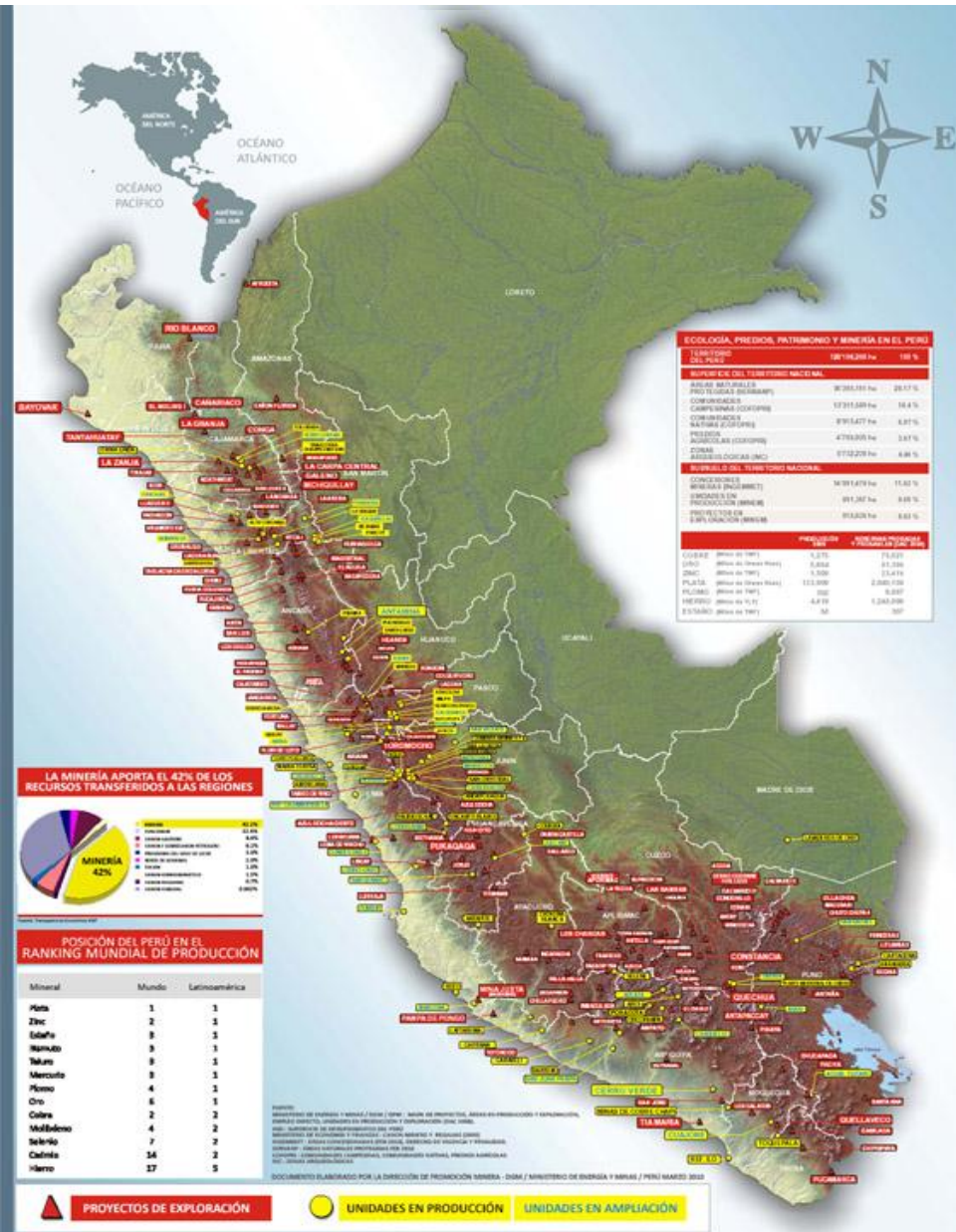
FEDURICC

- Federation demanded transparency from state investments in the irrigation sector.
 - Audited the state agency CODERECO
 - Through mobilizations demanded a change of several directors of CODERECO until a suited candidate was appointed.

“FEDURICC is our controller; they are the ones who supervise our work, our responsibility is in front of them. [...] Society has to be part of the control of our institution. It has to know how expensive a project is. Therefore they have access to all of the documents of the project and become part of the team that buys the materials for the projects, if not, how can we have a transparent administration. [...] they [the water user organisations] control us and we work together.” (February 2010)



Mining in Peru



- State promoter and regulator of mining operations in Peru
- Accountable to whom?





Absuelven a campesinos y policías

Mining in Peru

- Organized communities supported by NGOs have demanded transparency over:
 - Water allocations to mines
 - Environmental Impact Assessments
 - Demanded illegal water appropriation and pollution of mines
 - Negotiated water reallocations and compensation for communities





“Bofedales” – Highland swamps



Conclusions

- Accountability is established in relation to those that demand it... and according to the power geometries that exist in water governance.
- Transparency is one of the mechanisms through which authorities and other actors can hold accountable...



Conclusions

- But to hold accountable... is to have the power to do so.
- User organizations are the basis on which peasant users become empowered to demand accountability through:
 - legal means
 - federations an supra-community collaboration that give them broader spatial and political reach (up-scaling)
 - alliance building (with NGOs, governments, other grassroots organizations)



Conclusions

- So... yes, creating legal means and participatory spaces in which through transparency institutions can be held accountable in water governance are important...
- But... we argue that it is more important to create grassroots organizations through which peasants are empowered to hold state institutions and non-state actors accountable...



Conclusions

If I alone go to claim, no one will listen, but if we are organized, if we are linked to a large organization, we can, as they say.. 'our unity makes us strong'.

- Inés Chapi, peasant of the province of Chimborazo

