

Colombia

Providing ‘Water for Life’ in Rio Cauca

For many years farmers and local groups in the Cauca Valley struggled with vital resources to protect their watershed. A Water Fund is investing in new activity and education.

The context

There are c.2,750 family-run sugar plantations in Colombia’s Cauca Valley. Together they represent a major proportion of Colombia’s essential sugarcane industry. The farmers require abundant clean water throughout the year, but increasing demand for irrigation, a fast-growing population and climate change have led to serious water scarcity. For several decades, local river associations and NGOs worked with farmers to protect the watershed. They did so, however, in a context of insufficient resources and lacked a coordinating network to be able to strategically invest in new watershed areas and activities.

The action

In 2009, TNC joined forces with local groups, major industrial users in the region and the Colombian government environment authority to form the Water Fund, Fondo Agua por La Vida y La Sostenibilidad (“Water for Life and Sustainability”). Reflecting the diversity of its stakeholders, the Water Fund has multiple goals, including reducing dry season water shortages, reducing erosion to protect water quality, improving rural livelihoods and protecting biodiversity.

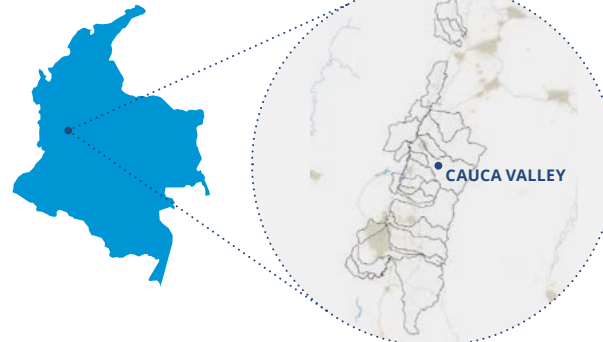
For the last seven years the Water Fund has been strategically building upon and amplifying the work that river associations have been doing for many years. In addition to traditional source water protection activities (riparian buffers, forest protection, etc.), the Water Fund focuses on building environmental awareness and capacity around the sustainable management of natural resources.

The future

By 2016, more than 1,500 families had participated in *Agua por La Vida* activities through river associations like Asobolo, and an estimated 18,000 families experienced indirect benefits from improved watershed management. The Water Fund has worked on more than 10,170 hectares, including protecting 795 freshwater springs and fencing more than 802 kilometers of riparian forest. It has also supported nearly 400 home gardens, 610 hectares of agroforestry (coffee, banana and avocado), 1,500 hectares of silvopastoral systems, provided educational programs in 66 schools and supported over 25 local organizations dedicated to sustainable agriculture.



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“The Water Fund helped me by giving me trees. They educated us on how the trees aided preservation of water. Avocado trees have been good for the soil, and also to feed ourselves, to sell and to support my family. Water gives us life, because without water there is no life.”

Maria Esmeralda Marcillo, local farmer

Read the full story at: global.nature.org/content/beyond-the-source

Lead the way to a secure water future with the Water Funds Toolbox

What are Water Funds?

A Water Fund is a framework that enables cities, communities and companies to invest in the management of the landscapes where their water is sourced; so that upstream forests and wetlands are protected to continue naturally cleaning and filtering water. Upstream communities can benefit from enhanced livelihoods and improvements to health and wellbeing whilst downstream communities experience improved water quality and, in many cases, fewer disruptions and shortages.

What is the Water Funds Toolbox?

The Water Funds Toolbox is a step-by-step online guide for developing a Water Fund. It features videos, testimonials, templates, tools, case studies and much more. The heart of the toolbox is the Water Fund Project Cycle, which outlines the five phases that take a Water Fund from feasibility through to maturity.



Ready to make a difference?

Develop your knowledge

Through the Water Funds Toolbox you can access the state of the art curriculum for developing Water Funds. Authored by Water Funds practitioners for practitioners.

Curriculum includes:

- Water Funds 101
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Action Planning
- Courses specific to governance, science, finance, implementation and communications

[nature.org/WaterFundsTraining](https://www.nature.org/WaterFundsTraining)

Build your network

Join the global community of Water Funds practitioners working to apply and refine the Water Fund model around the world.

Network activities:

- Webinars
- Discussion boards
- News
- Member profiles
- Recognition programs
- Network-wide competitions
- Peer learning & review

[nature.org/WaterFundsNetwork](https://www.nature.org/WaterFundsNetwork)

Water Fund Project Cycle

1

Feasibility

Defining the problem, attracting partners and hiring the WF Director

2

Design

Developing a strategic plan with solutions and establishing the WF governance

3

Creation

Formalizing the WF structure and official launching

4

Operation

Developing and implementing annual work plans

5

Maturity

Securing the WF's long-term viability and creating large-scale impacts