

THE CRUZ DE MAYO COMMUNITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF WATER

The Cruz de Mayo Community in Ancash, Peru, faces two water challenges:

Climate change: Peru is one of the countries most affected by climate change in the world. The mountain glaciers are a very important source of water for most people living in Peru, but they are disappearing. The Cruz de Mayo Community relies on meltwater from glaciers above Lake Parón for its water supply. At the same time, the Community members are observing changes in the weather patterns – the rainy seasons are becoming shorter and the dry seasons much more extended.

Water management: Water from Lake Parón is essential for the community members – for irrigation, consumption and for their animals to drink. The lake also provides water for the nearby town, and for farming businesses in the valley. There is also a hydroelectric power station at the lake, which is privately owned. The discharge of water to generate hydroelectric power has been the cause of conflict.

Knowing the quality and quantity of the water is essential for recording any change that might occur in the future. It is important to monitor the levels of water in the lake and ensure it is made available fairly and sustainably to all those who need the water, whether for power, farming or daily life. Understanding the existing demands on the water supply in the area is also very important for negotiations around possible future mining activity. Mining has not yet begun in Cruz de Mayo, but concessions have been granted to mining companies in and around the area.

Why is our partner CEAS working with the Cruz de Mayo Community on water management?

CEAS started work with the Cruz de Mayo Community when relations between the villagers and the hydroelectric power company (Duke Energy) reached a crisis point. A dispute broke out over the levels of water discharged from the lake to the hydroelectric plant downstream. The water discharge eroded traditional irrigation systems and reduced the availability of water for drinking and farming in the community. The community were also upset that the natural beauty of the lake was affected when large quantities of water were discharged and worried that tourists would not want to visit it. CEAS started working to help the community build up the expertise and negotiating power to defend their right to water as an equal with all the other users of the lake, including the hydroelectric company.

Has there been any progress?

There has been progress. CEAS has worked to value the knowledge that members of the Cruz de Mayo Community already have of their environment, and to train them in technical skills for monitoring water quality and the lake levels. These skills have enabled the community members to partake in constructive dialogue with the hydroelectric company Duke Energy and officials from the National Water Authority regarding the management of water from Lake Parón. Previously, large volumes of water were discharged from the lake without consultation with the community. Now, Cruz de Mayo participates and consents to any discharge and any regulatory decision regarding the management of Lake Parón. Although there has been progress, it is essential that we

continue to support the community. Recently, ownership of the hydroelectric power station changed hands, so it is important to ensure negotiations regarding the management of Lake Parón continues with the new company and all parties concerned. Mining concessions have been granted in the valley, and although mining activities have yet to begin, all the water users, including Cruz de Mayo need to be prepared for negotiations and choosing between mining or an alternative economic development that makes sustainable use of land and water. Mining is a water-intensive industry that would add considerable strain on water resources. Mining also has a highly conflictive record in Peru, given large socio-environmental impacts on nearby rural farming and indigenous communities. It is possible that water for drinking and agriculture would be affected and other livelihood activities put at risk, including the very subsistence of the Cruz de Mayo Community.

What about climate change in Cruz de Mayo?

Our partner CEAS is also working with the Cruz de Mayo Community to look at possibilities for developing sustainable livelihoods where they currently live. CEAS and the Cruz de Mayo Community are specifically aiming for an environmentally sound economic development: one that makes sustainable use of land and water in a context of high vulnerability to climate change. Parón is a lake surrounded by seven glaciers, but with glaciers melting due to global warming, and changes in rainfall patterns and droughts, an important component of the project will be to identify alternative viable economic activities in a context of greater future water scarcity.

Take action on climate change

In his encyclical of 2015, Pope Francis asks us to reflect on the world around us. We are called to reject the contemporary 'throwaway' culture and to open our eyes to see how God is present throughout creation. We bear witness to the reality facing many of our sisters and brothers across the world, who are being pushed deeper into poverty due to the changing climate. Pope Francis invites us to a change of heart; individually, as a community, and at an international level, so we may truly respond to "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" #49. Why not use CAFOD's Laudato Si' resources to reflect on how your parish can live more harmoniously with our Earth: <http://cafod.org.uk/Pray/Laudato-Si> . You could also get involved with CAFOD's One Climate One World Campaign: <http://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/One-Climate-One-World/About-the-campaign>

A prayer for our earth

All powerful God, you are present in the universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with your peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle, for justice, love and peace.

'A prayer for our earth' was published in Pope Francis' encyclical, Laudato Si'.