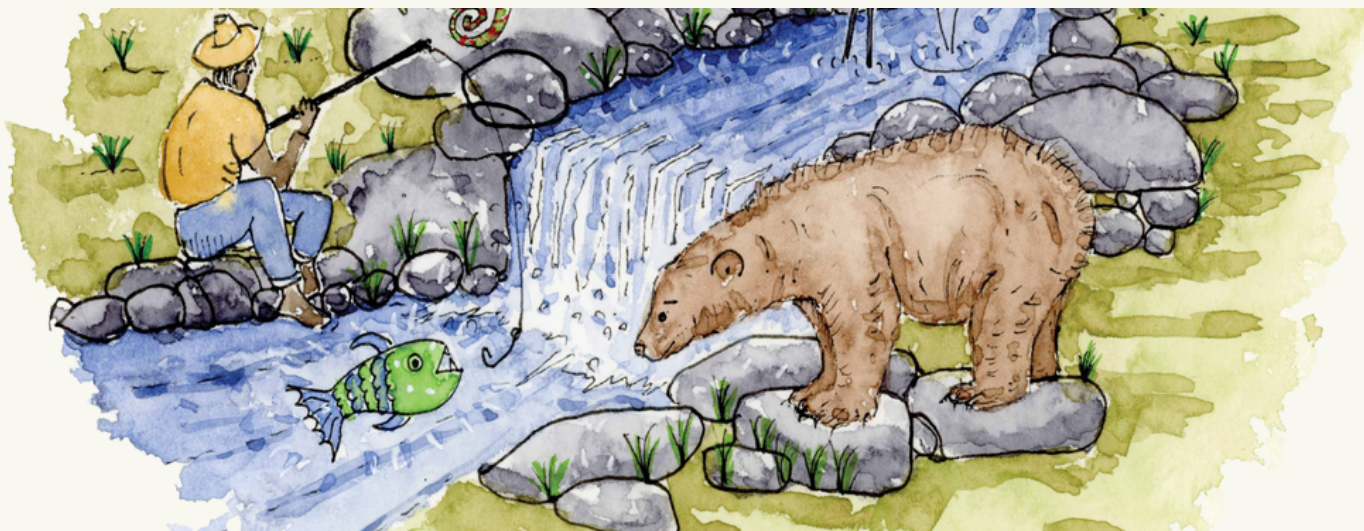




THE TRANSFORMATIVE WATER PACT



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1) Introduction

In March 2023, world leaders and stakeholders across sectors will gather in New York for the UN Water Conference, dedicated to address the global water crisis. From countless experiences of people around the globe, and supported by substantial scientific evidence, it is obvious that major changes are needed in the way we share and care for water. In the decades since the last UN Water Conference in 1977, water sources have been further exploited and polluted for the economic gains of a few. As a result, ecosystems have deteriorated and the majority of the world's people have been left with too little and unsafe water to rely on.

1.1 What is the Transformative Water Pact?

The Transformative Water Pact (TWP) has been developed in response to the continued exploitation of nature, neglect of human rights and the extreme power-imbalances that characterize contemporary water governance throughout the world. It details an alternative vision of water governance based on the tenets of environmental justice, equality and care. The TWP spans two sections of *key principles* and a *framework for action*, that provide anchor-points and strategic priorities to guide decision-making for transformative change in water governance.

1.2 What is transformative water governance?

Water governance is defined here as the decision-making processes and associated (formal and informal) institutions and power relations that influence the flows, quality, use, availability and distribution of water, whether it be fresh or salt, surface or subsurface. *Transformative* water governance refers, in turn, to the decision-making processes, institutions and power-relations that are needed to foreground environmental justice, equity and care in relation to water.

1.3 How was the Transformative Water Pact developed?

The TWP was initiated by the Dutch environmental justice organization Both ENDS and the international water knowledge institute IHE-Delft. It was developed and authored by a diverse group of 40+ environmental justice advocates from civil society and academia, notably from the Global South, who work extensively on water-related issues throughout the world. It's content was defined through a process of online round-tables and writing from December 2022 to February 2023. The TWP is a living document that can serve as a basis for further discussion and refinement.

1.4 For whom is the Transformative Water Pact intended?

The TWP can be endorsed by any actor that supports the transformative principals and is committed to implementing the framework of action within their own area of expertise and sphere of influence, including Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), policy-makers, academics, private sector actors, community groups and governmental organizations.

2) EXPRESSION OF COMMITMENT

By signing the TWP we express the following:

1. Our support of the key principles of Transformative Water Governance
2. Our intention to contribute to implementing the Framework of Action, within our respective areas of expertise and spheres of influence.
3. Our commitment to refrain from any activities that undermines the principles or actions detailed in the TWP
4. Our commitment to transdisciplinary collaboration and learning with other signatories of the TWP.
5. Our commitment to motivate other actors to join the TWP.
6. Our commitment to speak out against actors, policies or practices that undermine the principles or actions detailed in the TWP.

3) KEY PRINCIPLES OF TRANSFORMATIVE WATER GOVERNANCE

1. **Transformative Water Governance recognizes that water is an essential element for sustaining all life on earth**, and that the flourishing of water bodies and surrounding ecosystems must be prioritized as an end in itself.
2. **Transformative Water Governance recognizes that water has diverse cultural, indigenous, social, spiritual and natural values**, giving priority to value systems that nurture common well-being and environmental care.
3. **Transformative Water Governance recognizes water and water bodies as commons**, in which communities play key roles as custodians of knowledge for their effective, affective and equitable care.
4. **Transformative Water Governance protects and enforces human rights and human rights declarations as confirmed by the UN general assembly**, including but not limited to; the Human Right to Water and Sanitation, the Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, and the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
5. **Transformative Water Governance acknowledges that, the current crises of water quality, safety, access and distribution are deeply related to unsustainable human activity**, including but not limited to; extractivism, agricultural intensification, deforestation, large-scale river damming, impacts on biodiversity (biodiversity loss and introduction of invasive species), industrial groundwater extraction, large-scale land reclamation, land grabbing, corruption and climate change.
6. **Transformative Water Governance acknowledges that contemporary water crises are shaped by unequal power relations and injustices**, that result in an unequal distribution of risks and benefits associated with water, to the detriment of marginalised groups including women, indigenous people, peasants, ethnic minorities, subsistence farmers, fisherfolk and people in conditions of poverty.
7. **Transformative Water Governance recognizes that present-day inequities in water governance have their roots in historical systems**, such as capitalism and uneven development, manifested in climate change and the logic of privatization and unlimited growth; neocolonialism, manifested in the hegemonic knowledge and interests of former colonizers and industrialized countries; and patriarchy, manifested in gender discrimination and the exploitation of women's (unpaid) labor.
8. **Transformative Water Governance recognizes the differentiated responsibilities associated with contemporary water and climate crises**, and that the responsibility for change lies notably with industrialized countries, political and economic elites, (multinational) corporations and other groups and actors that have benefited from unjust and unsustainable water use.
9. **Transformative Water Governance recognizes that responsive public institutions are a precondition for the sustainable and just governance of water**, through progressive policies, regulation, funding, trans- and interdisciplinary collaborations and civic engagement.
10. **Transformative Water Governance underscores the need for safe civic space, which allows citizens to freely and safely speak out and mobilise**, thus serving as a precondition for responsive, inclusive and socially just decision-making in relation to water.

3) FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Based on the above principles, and to achieve Transformative Water Governance, we commit to actively implement, support and call upon others to:

Responsive public institutions

1. **Analyse the role, functioning and power relations of formal and informal institutions** engaged in the day to day governance of water in a given context, in order to identify the challenges, opportunities and strategic priorities for supporting transformative water governance.
2. **Adopt a rights-based approach** in formulating, implementing and harmonizing cross-sectoral laws, policies, and/or programming that effect the flows, quality, use, availability and distribution of water.
3. **Support inclusive, gender-just community-led water governance** by placing community needs, knowledge and aspirations at the centre of decision-making processes and institutional reforms related to water, in a manner that is attentive to intra-community diversity and power relations.
4. **Support capacity development and transdisciplinary learning among water sector professionals**, to become attentive and responsive to the needs, knowledge and aspirations of communities.
5. **Prioritize equitable revenue generation and investment** in order to strengthen the capacity of formal and informal institutions for equitable water management and ecological restoration, based on the needs, knowledge and aspirations of communities
6. **Undertake contextually suitable institutional reforms** for the public management of water bodies, which recognize water and related infrastructures as commons.
7. **Uphold transparency and free and easy access to information** for all people concerning policies and practices that impact the flows, quality, safety, availability and distribution of water.

Knowledge exchange and development

1. **Support inclusive, transdisciplinary collaboration and joint learning** between citizens, practitioners, academics, policy makers, civil society actors and private sector actors engaged in water governance, with the aim of overcoming existing knowledge hierarchies and power disparities in water governance.
2. **Protect, foster and learn from indigenous and traditional knowledge systems and water management practice** that foreground common well-being and the intrinsic value of nature.
3. **Facilitate and subsidize inclusive, transnational learning exchanges between communities and civil society actors engaged in water governance** in different geographical contexts and at different scales, to cross-fertilize experiences with community-based water management and translate these experiences into policy recommendations at the regional, national and international level.
4. **Facilitate and subsidize the development of inclusive innovations in water services**, for underprivileged, marginalized and traditionally excluded groups, based on their needs, knowledge and aspirations.
5. **Establish qualitative and quantitative public water monitoring campaigns**, with a particular focus on water bodies that are subjected to withdrawals and/or pollution by large-scale water users.

Justice and equality

1. **Analyse how systemic inequities are reflected in contemporary policies and practices**, with the aim of developing and implementing corrective measures to redress inequities.
2. **Adopt an inter-sectional and rights-based perspective into water policy formulation**, in order to prioritize the redressing of (historical) injustices towards groups marginalized by society.
3. **Guarantee and protect safe civic space and the right to assembly**, such that individual civil society actors can safely and freely speak out, and ensure the protection of environmental human rights defenders with special attention to women.
4. **Assure Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and veto rights to communities** in the case of new infrastructural, large-scale agricultural, mining, industrial and other developments affecting water flows, quantity, quality, availability or distribution.

Local capacity

1. **Strengthen local capacities** of community-led water management organizations based on the needs and priorities as identified by communities themselves.
2. **Support the establishment of horizontal networks** between community organizations within a shared water system, to promote and strengthen a sense of solidarity among water users and foster learning exchanges.
3. **Provide legal support and institutional strengthening** to community-based organisations and community-led water management organizations, so that they can assert their rights within the context of water governance.

Ecological integrity

1. **Enforce moratoriums** on large-scale infrastructure developments, mining concessions, large-scale agriculture and forestry, and other industries that threaten water rights and/or ecological integrity.
2. **Develop ecologically restorative environmental management strategies** at the watershed level through inclusive and gender just community-based spatial planning.
3. **Make the rehabilitation of degraded watersheds a fiscal and political priority.**
4. **Compensate communities fairly for their custodianship** of ecosystems, whether their custodianship be de facto or de jure.

International regulation

1. **Support the development and implementation of binding international laws and regulations for multinational enterprises operating abroad**, whose business activities affect water flows, quality, quantity, availability or distribution.
2. **Stimulate trans-boundary collaboration** between states and societies that share water bodies to ensure sustainable and socially just governance of water bodies and their surrounding ecosystems across borders.