



EDEKA AND WWF  
PARTNERS FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY



# COLLECTIVE ACTION IN COLOMBIA

“THE PLATAFORMA DE COOPERACIÓN Y CUSTODIA  
DEL AGUA” IN RÍO FRÍO AND RÍO SEVILLA – A CASE  
FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP

# THE WATER STEWARDSHIP PLATFORM

## Intro

One farmer or group of farmers alone cannot reduce the high physical, regulatory and reputational water risks in Río Frío and Río Sevilla. Consequently, the Water Stewardship Platform was implemented in March 2015: La Plataforma de Cooperación y Custodia del Agua (PCCA). It is a vehicle for participation, cooperation, coordination, communication and collective action aiming at a more sustainable river basin management.

The platform is facilitated by WWF Colombia with support from the consulting firm Good Stuff International. Since its foundation, the PCCA has made progress in socializing, building capacity, developing joint strategies and executing projects on mitigating water risks, conserving strategic ecosystems and promoting water governance at a local level.

## Objectives

- ~ Knowledge sharing to support participatory decision making processes
- ~ Participation and engagement of key stakeholders
- ~ Collective actions for ecosystem conservation and sustainable water use
- ~ Communication
- ~ Financial sustainability

## Participants



**Public sector:** regional environmental agency, national agency for national parks, local university and others.



**Private sector:** associations and charity foundations of banana, oil palm and coffee sector.



**Civil society:** WWF, The Nature Conservancy and local NGOs.

## Achievements

- ~ established a dialogue among watershed stakeholders
- ~ continuously engaged 14 public, private and civil society entities in meetings and collective actions
- ~ achieved a shared understanding of the territory and its water situation: up-to-date and open-access Watershed Information System (<http://data.goodstuffinternational.com/santamarta>)
- ~ provided environmental education in communities
- ~ conducted collective reforestation activities
- ~ obtained legal advisory for inter-institutional actions and agreements
- ~ included indigenous people living in Sierra Nevada
- ~ produced four project concepts reflecting interests of stakeholders and communities

## Outlook

The above listed activities show the significant progress which has been made. The establishment of dialogues and a cooperative spirit can already be seen as successes in a region characterized by distrust and conflict. However, all involved stakeholders are aiming at higher goals. In order to drive real impact, both physically in the river basins and in their sustainable management, **local leadership** is crucial as well as broader and more **sustainable financial equipment**.

The partners commenced working with local stakeholders to improve their leadership skills, aiming at transferring main roles and tasks into local hands. Partners are engaged in proposal writing to tap additional funding sources and to bring additional relevant stakeholders on board to support the platform processes.



### **1 Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta**

One of the world's highest coastal mountain range, reaching an altitude of up to 5,700 m. 36 rivers spring from this mountain range, it is home to 44 of Colombia's 340 endemic species. Colombia's second oldest national park is populated by about 30,000 indigenous people.

### **2 Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta**

Colombia's biggest coastal lagoon and the country's first Ramsar site. It is an important habitat for birds and fish species. Its main ecosystems are mangrove areas, floodplains and coastal lagoons, which are connected by a complex net of channels.



## RÍO FRÍO & RÍO SEVILLA

Born in the Sierra Nevada and running into the Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta, the watersheds cover an area of 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> along 63 km (Rio Frio) and 87 km (Rio Sevilla) respectively.



### 3 Banana Production

Banana exports represent nearly 50 % of the district's agricultural GDP. In the Ciénaga and Zona Bananera municipalities, banana exports are estimated to account for 116 million USD per year.

### 4 Oil Palm Production

Palm plantation watersheds account for 14 thousand hectares. Palm exports in the Frio and Sevilla watersheds were estimated at 69 million USD in 2016.

### 5 Coffee Production

Coffee plantations in the Frio and Sevilla watersheds account for 4,908 hectares with estimated exports of 5 million USD in 2016.

# THE CONTEXT: RÍO FRÍO AND RÍO SEVILLA

The Frío and Sevilla rivers are born in the **Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta**, one of the highest coastal mountain ranges in the world and end in the **Ciénaga Grande**, Colombia's largest protected wetland (Ramsar site). The region has a marked dry season from January to May.

Climate change scenarios indicate that it will go from semi-arid to arid, experiencing a precipitation reduction of 25% by 2040.

The downstream areas of the two watersheds lie in the **Zona Bananera**. As the name suggests, agriculture is the main economic activity, with banana and oil palm as primary crops grown in the plains. The region supplies 90% of its banana production to international markets. Approximately 40% of this production is located in the Frío and Sevilla watersheds.

## **The region faces a number of severe water-related challenges:**

- ~ **Water stress** in the dry season due to over-abstractions by agricultural activities
- ~ **Floods causinig** severe economic damage during wet season
- ~ **Degradation** of riparian zones
- ~ **Low water quality** and high levels of sediments reaching Ciénaga Grande
- ~ Mangrove loss/degradation due to increased salinization and hence declining fish populations
- ~ Low **drinking water and sanitation** coverage for the public
- ~ Poor levels of **trust and communication** among stakeholders
- ~ Lack of sustainable river basin **management, regulation and enforcement**



## The EDEKA-WWF Banana Project

In a joint project EDEKA, Germany's leading food retailer, and WWF are implementing actions to make banana production more sustainable. Together with conventional banana growers in the Zona Bananera in Colombia and in Ecuador, they are focusing on ecosystems & biodiversity, water management, integrated pest & soil management, climate protection, waste management and social issues.

When applied solely, on-farm measures do not sufficiently address water challenges in the catchment. An inclusive approach beyond the farms' fence lines needed to be developed and applying Water Stewardship became one of the project's goals.



## Get in touch!

The Plataforma is a growing community and a great example for Water Stewardship and collective action. Further institutionalization, local leadership and financial sustainability is needed to deliver real impact for the region. If your organization is working in, investing in or sourcing from the area, we are inviting you to get in touch with us!

## The benefits in a nutshell:



Reduce water risks; no matter if you want to effectively reduce your own risks, the risks of your suppliers or of local businesses and people in general.



Build strong relationships; no matter if you want to engage with supply-chain partners, local stakeholders or development actors.



Use outreach opportunities; no matter if you want to communicate to customers, donors or investors.

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