Water and Peace  
Venezuela  
International House New York  
Jesus Armas

The Context

Since 2013, Venezuela has lost more than 75% of its gross domestic product, causing a complex humanitarian crisis and one of the largest migration and refugee crises on the planet, resulting in more than 7 million Venezuelans living outside of the country. Venezuela is characterized by its inequality. According to the Living Conditions Survey carried out in 2022 by the most prestigious universities in Venezuela, the country has a Gini Coefficient of 0.603, ranking it among the most unequal nations in the world. Caracas is no different; it is probably the most unequal city in Venezuela.

The Venezuelan capital has been described as one of the most violent places on the planet, reaching 130 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2017. This violence is associated with criminal gangs in the poorest sectors of the city, such as La Cota 905, El Paraíso, La Vega, and El Cementerio. These gangs have turned these shantytowns into states within the state, where they control violence and crime. In addition, political polarization has marked Venezuelan society. Much of the violence that is seen within Venezuela is politically motivated. For many years, the epicenter of these episodes of political violence was in Caracas, specifically regarding the differences between the militants of the ruling party and the rest of society. At the same time, violence in Caracas is also associated with the actions of the State, especially in communities such as La Vega. For example, in 2021, the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the UN expressed:

“Reports of extrajudicial executions continue in the context of security operations. In early January, at least 14 individuals were allegedly killed during an operation conducted in the Caracas neighborhood of La Vega.”

Caracas is affected today by a serious access to water crisis. The inhabitants of Caracas spend an average of 65% of the week without receiving piped water. Water access is unequal between different sectors, and the quality at which it reaches homes is a health concern. This has created a black market for water through water trucks and bottled water, causing families’ monthly spending to increase significantly.

The Project

We aim to build and train a network of community leaders on nonviolent tactics and peacebuilding to defend the human right to water in Caracas, Venezuela.

Inspired by the actions of Mahatma Gandhi, the U.S. Movement for Civil Rights, and the theories of the United States Peace Institute and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (among other academics), we will develop workshops adjusted to the needs of community leaders who are struggling for the human right to water in the most violent communities of Caracas. The workshops are divided into two segments. The first part of the workshop seeks to provide strategic tools based on the concept of nonviolent action as a method of advancing social, political, and economic change. This part of the workshop includes protest, noncooperation, and intervention tactics designed to shift power in a conflict without threatening or using violence. The second part of the workshop seeks to further inspire community leaders to be promoters of peace in their communities through participatory processes involving dialogue, principled negotiation, mediation, and collective problem solving. This part helps leaders address the growing failures in Venezuela regarding access to drinking water and strengthen civil society’s capacity to demand better services through nonviolent actions.

With a network of community leaders supporting us, our organization collects more than a thousand surveys weekly from five different regions of the country using a Geographic Information System to make the problem visible at local and national levels. Now we want to go one step further and encourage these and other 50 community leaders to lead this struggle. Beyond just collecting and showing data, we want to build a network trained to mobilize their communities to defend people’s right to water and promote the value of peace. This network will be made up of community leaders of different political visions and from different communities. Some of these communities have tensions between them, such as political conflicts or between criminal gangs, but they all have issues with access to water. This is an opportunity to bridge the gap between opposing groups and to build peace through looking for a solution to a common problem.

This project aims to train 100 community leaders from the La Vega, La Cota 905, El Paraíso, and La
Pastora sectors of Caracas through five eight-hour workshops of 30 people. Subsequently, we want to support these leaders in designing and implementing at least three non-violent activities to pressure authorities into improving water access in their communities. These activities can be any or a combination of the actions suggested by the Albert Einstein Institute\(^{iii}\). These actions will be combined with a social media campaign designed and implemented by our organization to amplify the reach of the communities.

Finally, we will organize a meeting with the 100 members of the network to create a closer relationship between the different communities. Some of these communities have rivalries, political differences, gang violence problems, or no inter-inhabitant relationships. Therefore, starting a conversation between them using the need for water can be a unifying element, and water access can promote dialogue and decrease polarization. Also, this event will be an occasion to provide feedback on the workshops and activities and plan future steps of the network. This is because the goal is for this organization to transcend the Davis Project and be maintained over time to create a culture of peace and continue achieving quality water supply in each sector.

**General Objective**

We seek to strengthen a network of 100 community leaders who fight for the human right to water in the most violent sectors of Caracas and train them to develop nonviolent action and peacebuilding strategies and tactics. Through this, they can use this knowledge to build sustainable peace and achieve the goal of improving access to water in their communities.

**Activities**

1. Five eight-hour workshops with 20 participants each.
2. Design a social media campaign to promote the network and its activities. The social media campaign will include testimonial videos, videos of the activities carried out, and publications for Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, and Twitter.
3. At least three non-violent activities designed by the community leaders and supported by the non-governmental organization (NGO).
4. An event with all participants to build trust between the different community leaders, share experiences in the fight for water and the construction of peace, and help produce a document to be delivered to the hydrological company of the city.

**Results**

1. A network of 100 trained leaders.
2. A reach of at least 50,000 people on social media.
3. Non-violent actions reported in the media.
4. Document delivered to the hydrological company of the city describing the problems of these communities.
5. Dialogues promoted in the communities and among community leaders because of the workshops and the meetings.

We hope that this network will be maintained long-term. We aim to include many of the participants in other programs of our NGO and be able to continue organizing activities with them to promote peace and the human right to water.

**Evaluation Plan**

- Number of participants (list of assistance).
- A survey with the participants’ opinions of the workshop.
- Number of non-violent water-related initiatives organized by the participants.
- Monthly media appearances by the network (T.V., radio, news websites, etc.).
- Social media campaign reach.

This program will be carried out by the NGO Ciudadania Sin Límites, of which Jesús Armas is the President, legal representative, and founder.

\(^{i}\) https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/12/06/cf-venezuelas-migrants-bring-economic-opportunity-to-latin-america

\(^{ii}\) https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/12/06/cf-venezuelas-migrants-bring-economic-opportunity-to-latin-america

\(^{iii}\) https://assets.website-files.com/5d14c6a5c4ad42a4e794d0f7/636d0009b0c59ebfd2f4acd_Presentacion%20ENCOVI%202022%20completa.pdf
Water and Peace
Venezuela
International House New York
Jesus Armas

viii https://www.aeinstein.org/nonviolentaction/198-methods-of-nonviolent-action/