

## Appendix to the Report :

- Observations on “Public Water for All - Symposium on Improving Public Water Delivery” (by Philipp Terhorst)
- Short summary of questionnaire results (by Philipp Terhorst)

### ■ Observations on the symposium

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The symposium happened at a time when the international water debate is at cross-roads. Inside the Fourth World Water Forum there was a growing recognition of the importance of public water but also a realisation that private sector tools in water and sanitation delivery are failing. At the same time there *is a growing international social movement* that not only demand(s) political space for public water but also draws on the multiple cases of functioning and improved public water systems in places ranging from Varages (France) over Tamil Nadu (India) to many cities in Brazil. The symposium highlighted and problematised fresh, progressive, citizen-led perspectives for public water and sanitation services, aiming to positively impact on this conjuncture,

### **Background**

The symposium aimed to foster a new discourse on public water, on the basis of experiences, shared debate and collective learning. In this sense, the event on 15 March 2006 was a contribution to ongoing debates and exchanges between those fighting for and building democratic public water systems. For example, as part of the preparation of the symposium, Corporate Europe Observatory and the Transnational Institute, as part of the “Reclaiming Public Water” network, collected and synthesised experiences and views on Public-Public Partnerships, which resulted in the publication “Public Water for All, the Role of Public-Public Partnerships”.

The symposium is part and parcel of an experiment in progress; an experiment of transnational network-building, collective learning and the social development of a new discourse and practice on public water. This ongoing trend for public water for all first emerged during civil society events parallel to the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto (2003) and further developed during several editions of the World Social Forum (2004 – 2006). As one example of this trend, groups and people from around the globe worked together to write “Reclaiming Public Water, Achievements, Struggles And Visions From Around The World” (January 2005). Out of this project, a network with the same name emerged in November 2005. This collective work and many other initiatives around the world allow water professionals, trade unionists, campaigners and users to develop, step by step, a new form of agency to demand, explore and put in place democratic, effective public water.

The aim of the symposium was to draw out lessons, discuss important aspects of the various different experiences and discuss these in relation to a multitude of local contexts and realities. The symposium explored the potentials, secrets, measures, strategies, techniques, and obstacles of public water delivery.

### **Summary and discussion**

The symposium offered a fascinating overview of public water experiences and highlighted how improvements are achieved in the common threads of public water democratisation and public-public partnerships. The presentations and discussions clearly showed that the public character of water and sanitation services involves much more than mere public ownership. Indeed, the pursuit of public interest, professional passion, accountability, and democratic control are the elements of a broad understanding of “publicness”. In this sense, and the discussion showed this very clearly, public water and public-public partnerships are the keys to a new discourse, an evolving agenda, and growing awareness. Networks in support of public water are being consolidated, and represent the core to a fresh agency, which is being constructed by water managers, workers, citizens, politicians, and civil society campaigners.

The event strengthened the international voice of those promoting improved public water and was a great opportunity to carry forward and broaden ongoing exchanges and debates. As such, it offered an open space for experiences, voices, cases, visions that have no space in hegemonic discourse of ‘private sector participation’ (PSP) and commercialisation of water services of the World Water Council or the World Bank. Participants shared positive experiences, debated problems and obstacles and promoted cases and analyses that debunk the myths of the private sector and the “pensamiento unico” (ideological monoculture) of recent years in order to engage in the indispensable and essential debates about real alternatives to the growing water crisis.

An important aspect to stress in this search for viable, public solutions is the dialogue between sector professionals, academics and social movements, and other civil society groups. This dialogue was openly advertised, also in the hope that participants from the World Water Forum would step out of their lethargy, de-politicisation and pseudo-neutral stance in order to discuss public water alternatives.

The methodology of linking material experiences and conceptual debates with clear expressions of a vision for public water created an atmosphere of exchange, learning and discussion. This communication and structuring of positive agendas and discourses on the basis of real world experiences linked to the vision of public water is what made this symposium the valuable and perhaps unique space that it was.

The novelty of the symposium, and of the International Forum in the Defence of Water, lies with the new protagonism, the evolving agency of people’s organisations, political institutions, and public water companies. They shift debates to focus on the important task of improving and empowering public water delivery and show that it is possible through the multitude of

cases presented. The articulation of different experiences and different political backgrounds in a dialogue between existing sector experiences, civil society, institutions, stakeholders and sector professionals leads to the enrichment that the public sector requires to fulfil its historical task to implement the human right to water in a sustainable and just manner.

### **A short review of the symposiums content**

The session on successful public water models discussed the main ‘secrets’ behind successful public water delivery. The key drivers for democratisation are the demand from below, in other words social movements, pressure from political processes and the companies’ own internal willingness to embrace change. A key proposition coming out of the debates was that only when governments and societies enter into mutual relations will it be possible to create truly public systems. The general consensus of the symposium was that public systems and their effective improvements occur on the basis of democratisation, good governance, and professional management. What is needed is proactive action to involve populations and public utilities. For example, the trade union involvement in the creation of a new public company in Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, was based on such an involvement. The ongoing debate within this company about the role of participation of users and municipalities also shows the strength of public-democratic systems. It lies in the capability to adjust, change and incorporate improvements on the basis of principles of transparency, participation and social control, efficiency and sustainability, and equity. The elaboration of these principles into new company models can occur, as in the case of El Alto, La Paz in Bolivia, with bottom-up, social processes.

The main difficulties and how to overcome them was the theme of the second session called “Towards Improved Public Water”. Obstacles occur on all levels from individual to groups, organisational systems to external relations. The fact that good governance is a learning process and is acquired over time means that attitudinal changes require a lot attention and are the basis for change. A key factor here is the insecurity, and even fear, encountered when engaging in pro-public changes, as Michele Partage related from his own experienced in Varages, France. Another key factor is the conditionality and lack of financial support for public systems, as Julian Perez explained: “The World Bank would make available USD 5 million directly and USD 5 million at a later date but in the end only with the conditionality that the new model includes private capital”. As Silvano da Costa pointed out, a key debate about financing for public water is still to be had. Also, the limitations and blockages encountered so far in attempts to improve public water provision require the intensification of national and international cooperation, and association between municipalities, companies and social actors.

Anne Le Stratt stressed that “we need to create the basis of real public companies in the interest of consumers and not in the interest of private companies“. One participant asked: What can we do as campaigners to strengthen Public-Public Partnerships (PuPs) so that they can contribute to water for all?” It was also suggested that the clarification of financial issues would need a whole symposium in the future. Santiago Arconada opened his presentation with the question: “Water is a public good, what mode of a service company

does that imply?" He went on to argue that "There is no alternative without community (...). Cochabamba was the initial step." Mary Ann Manahan from Focus on the Global South in Manila summarised the gist of the current conjuncture with the example of Manila: "It is a classic example of failed privatisation. On the table now are civil-public partnerships, public alternatives, in other words post-private options are being planned but the private sector stays on so far."

The symposium has shown "our capacity to make it possible; that it is possible to create capable public companies", in the words of Hilda Salazar, COMDA (Mexico). Communities cannot wait for government action but have to give impulses themselves. We hope that the symposium has been such an impulse: "Water for all and with quality, public water for all, and especially via citizens' participation," as Silvano da Costa put it.

### **Consideration for the future**

A few important discussion points for further reflection have been voiced. Critical voices urged for more gendered organisation of the event. A sad explanation for the lack of women speakers, however, is that the water sector today does not offer many women in leading roles and positions. This is surely a key problem for water and sanitation and needs to be the focus of further exchange and debate.

A key point was raised about the use of the concept of clients. Many participants argued for the discourse of users, consumers and citizens rather than clients and costumers. This debate, triggered by the presentation on Stockholm Water that talked of service culture, was a valuable reminder of the need for the further articulation between different experiences and political backgrounds.

The box below summarises some key interventions, which will hopefully form part of future discussions.

- In Nepal, the civil society campaign faces the problem of a very poor public service (in the dry season water is supplied for only one hour every three or four days). In this situation it is hard to convince people that privatisation does not work. What tips can you give to create support for public options?
- What can a political process of transformation look like? Is there a process to be generalised by which communities can find alternatives? What levels of organisation, decision-making and so on is needed, in a context of a corrupted administration and decision-makers?
- What awareness strategy is needed, especially when communities appear to not care who delivers water as long as they get it?
- Privatisation of water is a long-term strategy of control and monopolisation by financial capital. It is about infrastructure to plan the economy and extract wealth. So we say we want to recuperate the learning of how we control our own collectivities by public systems. How can we make changes in technology, management and institutions?

- How do we expand the legitimacy for international public finance and especially for PuPs?
- How do we change experiences of mobilisation into re-appropriation? How can we push this strongly so that we can stimulate and learn about concrete options?
- In the models presented, how can development organisations and cooperation be of assistance?
- What kind of private sector participation are we opposed to? BOO, BOT, management contracts?
- How much subsidy exists in the successful cases to poor users?
- Alternatives work but the key question is about finance.
- How can we go from individual examples to a worldwide movement across countries and continents?
- Questions of resource and natural territories, and how to democratise these, were missing in the symposium
- Lack of analysis on what ecological points are to be looked at for developing countries, in these models. How do you work out relations with industry use? How can we plant mechanisms to control industry, a most important issue for water?

## ■ Short Summary of Questionnaire Results

Around 50 people filled in the questionnaire that had been prepared to help evaluate the symposium. The following is a brief summary of the main conclusions emerging from these responses.

### ***What were your reasons for attending the Symposium? Why is it relevant?***

- Learn from other experiences on Public-Public Partnerships (PuPs)
- Learn what are the factors that make public models work
- Learn more about alternatives to privatisation
- Get to know other movements and experiences
- Get informed about PuPs and how public options have been achieved
- Promote water and sanitation as essential public services and identify forms of assistance to developing nations
- Bring public models back to home country
- Looking for concrete examples
- Learn from other experiences to assure me that I am not alone and that we can unite
- Network with positive models and their managers
- Get to know and understand different experiences and the processes of planning, management and control of water with popular participation
- Looking for public alternative to privatisation
- Construct alternatives and an efficient and transparent public sector
- Conviction that water should stay public and not become a commodity
- Cross sectoral dialogues and creates opportunities to build alliances
- Move from confrontational issue on privatisation with a move to partnerships
- Need to think of specific models case by case, considering urgent circumstances
- Provides information, concrete examples, general encouragement for work at home in our communities
- Brings excellent information on the challenges of implementing public public and networking

### ***Treatment of public water and PuPs by the Fourth World Water Forum?***

- Very minimal space for addressing PuPs and issues of public water
- Promotor of PSP and privatisation
- WWF pays lipservice to the notion and continues with privatisation
- WWF should cast aside corporate focus and welcome PuPs

### ***Was the information new and fresh?***

1 (yes)	2	3	4	5 (no)
19	18	7	4	1

- Conceptual and practical
- Not new as working on the theme but recognition that others will benefit

### ***Next steps for public water and PuPs ?***

- Mainstreaming and popularising public water alternatives in Asia and Africa.
- Continue mapping of documentations of successful PuPs in these regions.
- Build further the linkages between different water issues... urban-rural, resources and provision, conflict and regulation etc. Services to resource management.
- Make broader linkages to groups/people working on broader commons issues, farmers etc
- Provide detailed plans for establishing PuPs
- More international networking and organising
- Create international treaty on water as a public right and a public good
- Meeting of public utilities that partner publicly
- Meeting of public water workers
- Individual academic studies on individual PuPs
- Link to existing campaigns such as PSI's Quality Public Service.
- Exchange information, collaborate in projects and give advice to communities.
- Build a network for information and resource sharing to promote positive public examples in accessible formats for municipal governments. Develop tools to provide concrete support to municipalities wishing to retain or return to public ownership and management
- Synthesise the existing initiatives. Extract and communicate experience and create permanent exchange
- Continue dialogue, meetings and sharing of best practices
- Timely support for recuperation experiences
- Make theme more profound analytically and more accessible and viable
- Build solidarity groups to interchange experiences
- Further develop understanding of pitfalls of PuPs, constraints, challenges and successes of PuPs

### ***Other comments:***

- Sets the tone of the water debate
- Opportunity for international dialogue, in the future dedicate more days on discussion and sharing
- Valuable opportunity to focus on how the public utilities can contribute to achieving the millennium goals
- One or two government representatives would have been good
- More women and African representation
- Better preparation and promotion of content before the event so that it can be more participative.
- The structure for the symposium was relevant and stimulating. Sadly, many presenters failed to provide robust answers to several questions from the floor.
- Few presenters took a reflective, self-critical approach to their work, which would have been very illuminating.
- Very good and well organised event and nice hospitality. We need to create an ongoing international network- Thank you!