

Reclaiming Public Water (RPW) Network - global strategy seminar outcomes

Close to 80 campaigners, community water activists, public water operators and unionists from 30 countries came together February 1st to the 3rd 2010, when the Reclaiming Public Water (RPW) Network held its global strategy seminar in Brussels, Belgium. The event was the first global RPW assembly since the network was launched in autumn 2005. The seminar was a space for sharing knowledge and experiences about improving public water provision through democratisation, partnerships between utilities and other actors (public-public partnerships) and other progressive solutions. No less important, the seminar focused on strategising on the next steps in research, campaigning and other joint work. An integral theme during the seminar was the impact of the climate change in exacerbating an already accelerating water crisis. [Final programme](#)

Among the many inspiring presentations was that of Anne Le Strat, director of Eau de Paris, who presented the first positive results of the newly established public water company in the French capital. Water delivery in Paris was re-municipalised as of 1st of January this year, after decades of privatisation. David Hall, director of Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), in his presentation added more examples of the turning tide against water privatisation, but also warned that – despite its numerous failures – privatisation is not yet off the political agenda.

This was confirmed in the regional updates. In Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas, there are still governments pushing for privatisation, often encouraged to do so by international financial institutions. However, it is clear that very significant progress has been made in promoting alternatives to privatisation in over the last five years. Several governments in Latin America and elsewhere have turned their back on privatisation and are promoting new progressive models of public water supply. Northern development aid donors have been forced to downscale their pro-privatisation discourse and are slowly starting to embrace alternatives such as public-public partnerships.

We evaluated the role of the RPW Network and regional water justice networks in all of these developments, and worked in workshops to reach a common understanding of progress made and new challenges in key areas— all as a basis for strategising about the next steps. In nine workshops, the participants develop concrete strategies and plans for future joint work. Several new working groups were created to implement joint activities, for instance to promote Public-Public Partnerships.

The workshops were as follows:

1. Democratisation experiments, Public-Public Partnerships (PUPs) and remunicipalisation
2. Defending the human right to water and the global commons
3. New forms of privatisation and commercialisation
4. National and regional platforms for PUPs
5. Implementing the human right to water
6. Mapping of alternatives, collective learning & outreach
7. Public funding for public water
8. Global Water Operators Partnerships (GWOPA)
9. The rural water crisis and water resources struggles

Using the outcomes of these workshops, the network concretised the collective work plans and agreed on the following five priorities:

- to work on the immediate and strategic political opportunities such as the EU Water Facility (funding for PUPs) and the Global Water Operator Partnerships Alliance (global governance for promoting PUPs);
- to build a process for continued mapping of alternatives and other collective learning;
- to support and engage with concrete emerging alternatives on the local/national and regional levels;
- to identify key events through which the RPW Network can advance its agenda; and
- to create a 'network support/facilitation team' to support the efforts of the thematic working groups.

The Reclaiming Public Water network will intensify its efforts to promote alternatives to water privatization. It will continue to be an open and horizontal network, as part of and serving the wider global movement against privatisation and for public water for all. Progressive public utility managers, unionists, activists, and researchers from around the world are warmly invited to get involved.

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See also <http://www.waterjustice.org/> & <http://www.tni.org/project/water-justice>

To get an impression of the discussions during the seminar, we also recommend you to watch the video of the [round table discussion \(23 mins\)](#), which featured the discussion of some of the active members in the network about the nature, role, 'gains', and future challenges of the Reclaiming Public Water network. Also, a [short version \(6 mins\)](#) is available. The round table discussion was held right after the seminar. We have also filmed four [interviews](#) with water activists and unions from China, the Philippines, Tanzania, and India. The interviews featured their efforts to build local alternatives with citizens, workers, and communities. We received a powerful and inspiring [video message](#) from the Change Management Team (Tamil Nadu, India), which was screened at the beginning of the seminar. The Change Management Team has launched the national platform called [Center of Excellence for Change \(CEC\)](#).