

FOREWORD FOR THE FRENCH EDITION

By the Reclaiming Public Water Editorial Team

The book you hold in your hands is the product of a long and exciting journey that activists, unionists, academics and progressive water managers collectively embarked upon more than six years ago. The journey began following a decision, made in a tent during the World Social Forum in Mumbai (January, 2004), to jointly compile a book on alternatives to privatisation. The book was launched a year later at the following WSF in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It instantly proved to be a source of inspiration for many around the world, with initial translations appearing before the end of the year. Since then the book has been published in 13 languages, including Spanish, Hindi, Chinese and Indonesian; a number of editions being launched in tandem with public events featuring the authors. With every new edition additional chapters were added, presenting up to date examples of efforts to improve public water delivery and secure water for all. These new contributions were published on the website of the Transnational Institute, in both English and Spanish, thereby providing an ever growing catalogue of cases of inspiring reform processes. In this way the publication has become a living document, enabling a collective process of sharing and learning.

Out of this experience and the shared vision that emerged, the Reclaiming Public Water network was created. The network, which supports the global movement against privatisation and for public water for all, is open and horizontally structured. In a short time it has become a crucial space for promoting alternatives to privatization; in particular democratization and other progressive reforms aiming to improve public water. In February 2010 a global assembly brought together some 80 progressive public utility managers, unionists, activists, and researchers from around the world in Brussels, to plan the network's next steps. The diversity displayed at this meeting is an important feature of the network, combining the perspectives and experiences of different actors struggling for democratization of water management in cities and villages around the world.

This current edition contains eight new chapters, replacing earlier contributions that are now available online.¹ The concluding chapter "Empowering Public Water – Way Forward", the result of a collective discussion among the authors, remains unchanged and remarkably relevant despite the five years that have passed since it was written. However, there have of course been very significant developments over the past years, a number of which could not have been predicted. The following pages will provide snapshots of some of these major trends, discussed more fully within the chapters added to this French edition of 'Reclaiming Public Water'.

A common theme among many of the new contributions is the key role of democratisation in improving public water management. The potential for reforming public water services by increasing citizen's participation and overall accountability is increasingly being recognised; examples can be found ranging from India, Bolivia and Peru to Spain and Italy. In the Spanish city of Cordoba, citizen's groups actively participate in water management decision-making, a key factor behind the high quality of the city's water services. In the Italian region of Abruzzo, in contrast, public water management suffers from under-investment and high leakage levels, but also from a serious lack of accountability and responsiveness to citizens. In its campaigns for sustainable management of the regions water, Abruzzo's citizens movement has been able to draw inspiration from the democratic water planning developed in Porto Alegre and elsewhere in Latin America.

In the Indian state Tamil Nadu, democratisation reforms have led to impressive improvements in the water supply for hundreds of thousands of people living in villages that were previously

neglected by the state water company TWAD. On the initiative of the Change Management Group, the TWAD engineers developed a new approach of working on an equal basis with rural water users to identify sustainable, low-cost solutions to water problems. Through prioritising the needs of the most marginal groups, and giving the community key roles in running water systems, the democratisation has resulted in fairer and more sustainable access to water, along with affordable water bills.

The chapter focusing on Cochabamba presents the now famous struggle to secure public water; in which US water multinational Bechtel was forced to leave the city following dramatic price increases and mismanagement during the 'Water War' in the year 2000. The citizens' groups that forced Bechtel out insisted on democratising the re-municipalised utility SEMAPA in order to more effectively serve the citizens, particularly the poorest communities. Some progress was made and SEMAPA agreed to work in a public-collective partnership with community water committees in peri-urban areas in order to expand access to piped water in unconnected poor areas. However, lack of support from the local political elite, and a range of other factors, have proven serious obstacles for the new model of community involvement and democratic control envisaged by progressive movements in Cochabamba.

Public-public partnerships have in the last few years emerged as an inspiring alternative to privatisation, providing a perspective for accelerating improvements in public water supply. . In 2006, a public-public partnership was launched between the remunicipalised public water company of the province of Buenos Aires and the public utility SEDAM in Huancayo, Peru. In response to the Peruvian government's plans to privatise the utility, community groups and trade unions had convinced the local municipal government and the public utility to embark on a PUP project instead. Detailed plans were developed for how the PUP could overcome the wide range of very serious water management problems from which it suffers, including high leakage levels and large parts of the city lacking piped water connections. Eventually, unfortunately, pressure by the national government led to the partnership being put on hold. Despite of this disappointing development, the Huancayo PUP did help stop privatisation. It also served as a source of inspiration and contributed to the creation of the Platform for Public and Communitarian Partnerships of the Americas, that has this year helped broker a new partnership between the Uruguayan state water company OSE and the water system SEDACUSCO of Cusco, Peru.

Since the first edition of the book appeared, major political changes have occurred in Latin American countries like Bolivia, Uruguay and to a lesser degree Argentina. In all these countries popular anger over water privatisation failures played a role in bringing more progressive governments to power. These political changes also closed the door on the privatisation experiments of the 1990's and opened up new, more people-centred models of public water management. Failing to deliver promised improvements and investments in water systems, private water giant Suez was in 2005-2006 forced out of Uruguay, the Argentinian capital Buenos Aires and the Bolivian cities of La Paz and El Alto. These dramatic developments reflect the general discontent with water multinationals following the World Bank driven privatisation boom in developing countries in the 1990s. Despite the lofty promises, private water corporations have consistently failed to deliver the promised improved access to water and sanitation for the poorest populations in developing countries. Instead they prioritised profits.

It would be premature to conclude that the private water giants have given up their global expansion, but their departure from so many major cities over the last five years has opened up space for a gradual change in the international water debate. Also, as a result of campaigning and awareness-raising by civil society groups, trade unions and progressive public water managers, there has been growing political recognition of the importance of the public sector and the

potential of public-public partnerships. After a decade or more where donors were obsessed with boosting the role of the private sector, we are beginning to see the creation of the international environment needed for public water to succeed. This is positive and necessary, but huge challenges remain.

A milestone was reached in March 2006 when the UN's advisory board on water and sanitation presented its recommendations, the so-called 'Hashimoto Action Plan'. The Board's chair, former Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, stated in his speech that "Public water services currently provide more than 90% of water supply in the world. Modest improvement in public water operators will have immense impact on global provision of services." Among the recommendations was the launch of a mechanism for the development of Water Operator Partnerships (WOPs). Without using the term public-public partnerships, the intention was clear: to improve water delivery through partnerships between public utilities. This was the first time that a major international institution had so clearly expressed support for this approach. As a result of a battle between PUP supporters and pro-privatisation lobbyists inside the UN advisory board, WOPs were defined as strictly not-for-profit, although private firms were not excluded. The WOPs proposal was welcomed enthusiastically by water justice activists as an initiative that could give a massive boost to the emergence of public-public partnerships and thus accelerate efforts to improve public utility performance around the world. The implementation was left in the hands of UN-Habitat and a Global Water Operator Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA) launched in 2009. Unfortunately, GWOPA relies heavily on regional development banks and Northern donor agencies, most of which are known for their determination to promote privatisation, while not showing much interest in public water solutions. The Asian Development Bank, for instance, seems to ignore the not-for-profit principle and instead interpret WOPs as a tool to help commercially-oriented public-owned water firms expand internationally and gradually transform into transnational companies.

Encouragingly, strong pressure from civil society groups and trade unions, including many involved in the Reclaiming Public Water network, has resulted in official support for PUPs being expressed, and financial commitments made, by the governments of the UK, the Netherlands and the European Commission, among others. This recognition of the importance of PUPs only occurred after prolonged campaigning to garner political pressure against the use of development aid to promote privatisation. A particularly significant development was the European Commission's decision to, for the first time ever, make funding available for public-public partnerships in the water sector as part of the new ACP(African, Caribbean and Pacific)-EU Water Facility. Although the amount (40 million euro) is relatively small compared with what is needed to achieve the MDGs, this policy change may mean the end of a period in which the EU was primarily promoting increased private sector involvement as the way forward for water delivery in Africa and elsewhere in the South.

One of the public water companies that is stepping up its involvement in public-public partnerships (PUPs) with water authorities in the South is Eau de Paris, the public water company of the French capital. Water in Paris was remunicipalised as of January 2010, after 25 years experience with privatisation contracts held by Suez and Veolia. Paris, which is often regarded as the heartland of water privatisation, is where the headquarters of the two water giants are located, making the city's return to public management of water services a strong symbolic signal. The chapter in this book by Anne Le Strat, president of Eau de Paris, gives fascinating insights into the fast improvements that can be achieved after remunicipalisation. Paris is the most remarkable example, but remunicipalisation is a growing trend in France and other parts of the world where privatisation of water has proven disappointing, if not disastrous. Examples include Hamilton, Atlanta and Felton in the US, Dar-Es-Salaam and Mali in Africa, as well as numerous cities in Latin

America, a selection of which were mentioned earlier.

At the same time, other new chapters contained in this book provide evidence that the process of water privatisation is far from over. Large Moroccan cities such as Casablanca, Rabat-Salé and Tetouan are classic examples of water multinationals breaking the promises on which they were granted their contracts but, having established a position of power, essentially being beyond expulsion. The chapter on China shows that this country has, over the last five years, been the largest growth market for water multinationals, with privatisation leading to price hikes at the expense of the poor.

While these quick examples show that PPP-style privatisation is still going strong, there are also worrying new forms of privatisation gaining momentum. This includes management contracts in which private firms are guaranteed returns and avoid risks. These and other models are promoted by the World Bank, which grudgingly had to accept that their original privatisation recipes failed to deliver the promised results. However, it has far from abandoned its neoliberal instincts. Also increasingly popular among the water multinationals are Build-Operate-Transfer contracts which are highly profitable and also politically safer. New players have entered the privatisation market, including, ironically, some publicly owned utilities which are expanding abroad, operating essentially as private firms and repeating many of the same flawed approaches as other forms of privatisation. This reflects a related, deeply worrying trend of commercialising public water delivery, turning public utilities into profit-oriented companies without genuine public sector ethos. In rural areas, the commercialisation of irrigation water, again promoted by the World Bank and Northern governments, is a growing threat to small farmers.

Finally, when describing new trends in privatisation, a much broader view must be adopted as corporations increasingly come to identify water as a commodity of strategic importance. This includes consumer product giants like Coca Cola and Nestle whose bottled water sale is booming, leading them to aggressively expand their control over groundwater resources. Similarly, for agribusiness corporations undertaking land grabbing in developing countries, control over underground water is often a key motivation.

These disturbing trends only underline the importance of reclaiming water as a publicly owned and managed resource, a challenge that goes far beyond urban water issues. The only realistic solution to this crisis is to improve public water management in cities and rural areas across the planet. This can only be achieved through a hugely ambitious progressive reform agenda in which water management decision-making on all levels of society is re-oriented towards ecological sustainability and to 'reaching the un-reached'. Democratisation of water management, institutionalising the human right to water and the large-scale allocation of public funds are crucial conditions. Radical changes in the approaches of governments, both in the North and the South, and international financial institutions will be needed.

As an important source for knowledge and inspiration, this book contains numerous examples of how the water crisis can be overcome when political determination and the openness of mind to seek people-centred solutions are present.

i The eight chapters cover experiences ranging from cooperatives in Bolivia, India and Argentina, over public utility reform in Colombia and democratisation of water planning in Recife (Brazil), to the alternative visions of anti-privatisation campaigns in Slovakia, Manila and Mexico. They are available in English. See <<http://www.tni.org/tnibook/reclaiming-public-water-2>>