

## Concept note

Reclaiming Public Water Network Global Strategy Seminar  
1-3 February 2010

*Organised by RPW network, hosted by CEO, TNI, EPSU, PSI, Ingeniería Sin Fronteras (ISFADN), Cevi, Blue Planet project, Focus on Global South and) and CIPSI- in cooperation with the African Water Network, La Red VIDA (Vigilancia Interamericana para la Defensa y Derecho al Agua) & Our Water Commons*

Venue: Mundo-B building  
Rue d'Edimbourg 26 1050 Bruxelles  
[www.mundo-b.org](http://www.mundo-b.org)

Languages: English and Spanish (simultaneous translation)

## Introduction

In early 2010, the Reclaiming Public Water (RPW) Network will organise an international seminar on global water challenges and people-centered solutions (February 1st to the 3rd 2010, in Brussels). The focus of the RPW network is to promote people-centred democratic public management in order to make the human right to water a practical reality for everyone. The seminar will discuss people-centered, democratic responses to the global water crisis to secure safe and affordable water and sanitation services for all. Participants will bring their knowledge and experiences about how to improve water provision with the active participation of citizens in water management. In addition to diverse forms of democratisation of water management, we will also discuss concrete solutions such as partnerships between public water companies as a way to increase local institutional capacity for effective water management (public-public partnerships or PuPs).

The RPW network has over the last years developed a strong coordinated advocacy effort to convince donor governments to support **public-public partnerships** as an effective way to achieve improvements in public water management. Major progress has been made both in the South (India, Latin America, etc.) and in Europe. The seminar will be a key moment to strategise about how to consolidate and expand government support for progressive public water management, including PUPs.

The **Global Water Operator Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA)** of the United Nations is a fairly new multi-stakeholder global initiative in which the RPW network participates as an International Steering Committee member representing civil society, aims to build mutual support between water operators on a non-for profit basis. The GWOPA process is still in a fragile stage, where strong civil society involvement is needed to ensure that it reaches the goals for which it was initiated back in 2006. The Brussels seminar is of major importance to clarify how the network will most effectively contribute to the GWOPA process. The aim is to develop clear collective strategies and concrete action plans in this regard.

The RPW network has until now focused mainly on **(peri-)urban water services**, as this is where the main battlefield around commercialisation and privatisation was. Increasingly the focus is broadening to include **rural water issues** (highlighting community management and recovery of traditional water systems) and **water resource struggles** as well. The seminar will cover all of these areas in order to secure that water campaigns - regardless of the specific focus - share a holistic vision of water as an essential natural resource. The seminar will also explore how campaigns can practically advance the vision of water as global commons.

The seminar (the first global assembly since autumn 2005) will be a space for campaigners, community water activists, public water operators and unionists to learn from each other and strategise on research, campaigning and other joint work, enabling them to link up with each other and with allies both in the South and in the North. The outcomes of the conference will be disseminated for reference and outreach purposes internationally.

## Back ground:

Over the last five years, the RPW network has sought to advance the debate about **how to make public water systems work** better, a crucial factor for securing clean water and sanitation for all. To overcome water poverty, we believe it is of crucial importance to learn the lessons from **successful public water system reforms** based on active citizen's participation in planning and management taking place in numerous countries around the world. In the last 10-15 years, a positive trend has emerged in which local communities and public utilities have introduced **new approaches** to achieve improved water and sanitation for the poorest. Highlights include participatory public budgeting in Brazil, community-controlled water supply in a number of Latin American and African countries, and democratisation of rural water management in Tamil Nadu (India), to mention a few examples.

The RPW network works hard to advocate the firm and deep embrace of this trend by **donor (and developing countries) governments**. Given the fact that 90% of the world's drinking water is supplied by public authorities, these have a critical role in achieving water and sanitation for all. Therefore, a central focus of the network in the last few years has been to both advocate and facilitate **public-public partnerships (PUPs)**, the linking up of public water operators on a non-profit basis to strengthen management and technical capacity. These partnerships are an innovative and practical way of sharing the expertise of public water managers from Southern and Northern utilities with utilities that can benefit from this support. We promote PUPs not only as a policy instrument at governance levels but also as **tool of movements** to develop capacity to act by themselves. Importantly, 'public' in the RPW network's vision does not only mean public authorities: active **citizen's participation** in PUP projects is of crucial importance to ensure sustainable improvements in water services for the poorest. The role of civil society organisations, community groups and trade unions is essential to secure **accountability and responsiveness** of public utilities. Several years of persistent advocacy work to make development aid funds made available for Public-Public Partnerships (PUPs) and other pro-public approaches have resulted in a significant achievement in 2009: substantial **EU aid funding** will become available next year onwards to support these partnership projects through the new ACP-EU Water Facility. The conference could moreover serve as a space to discuss how public water utilities can strengthen their **public service ethos** and play active roles in developing PUPs.

In 2008 the RPW network with regional partners held successful **regional seminars** in Brussels, Cochabamba (Bolivia) and Chennai (India), focusing on water in respectively Europe, the Americas and Asia. Each regional process is advancing in different ways and dynamics. In Latin America, the **'Platform for Public and Community Cooperation in the Americas'** was established as a concrete result of the regional seminar. The Platform is making impressive progress in developing public-community partnerships among utilities and community groups in the region. There is no official network like Red Vida in Asia but the **Chennai meeting** succeeded in connecting groups working on water management reforms in the Asia-Pacific region and a number of important follow-up activities have already taken place. The **African Water Network** (established in 2007) has members from 21 countries in the continent. It has played an important role as a regional platform where civil society activists can unite to alleviate water poverty. The global seminar in February 2010 provides us with an opportunity to share progress made in these regional processes, learn from each other and **converge these regional developments** into a vibrant global dynamics. The seminar will be also a space to share **new cases of emerging local alternatives** to water privatization and identify lessons from these.

We propose to plan the seminar so it happens in conjunction (and close coordination) with the conference on **remunicipalisation of water services** that will be hosted in **Paris by France Liberte on 4-5 February** 2010. The conference will celebrate that Paris' water is being remunicipalised and enable participants to learn about the visions and strategies on remunicipalisation of public water company Eau de Paris and civil society in France. France Liberte also considers the conference as an opportunity to kick off discussions for **citizen's mobilisation towards the next World Water Forum** (Marseille, March 2012). Discussions on how to mobilise towards the WWF and possible strategies are to be discussed in Paris. The Brussels seminar therefore does not include these important discussions in the programme.

## Objectives:

5 years after the Reclaiming Public Water network was established, the global seminar will:

- 1) **evaluate** the RPW network's collective work and achievements in promoting alternatives to privatisation
- 2) create a space for effective **exchange of experiences and perspectives** on emerging alternatives including public-public partnership projects, participatory community water projects, remunicipalisation and democratic reforms of water utilities
- 3) analyse global institutional developments and new challenges
  - how far are we in achieving a shift in discourse and policy away from privatisation and commercialisation?
  - what are new roles, tasks and risks when the network engages with emerging opportunities?
  - political opportunities for civil society coalitions to influence policy processes at local and national level?
- 4) determine **strategic priorities and strategies** for the next years - searching for synergies with other thematic and regional water networks
- 5) reinvent network dynamics and network facilitation mechanisms

In terms of the strategies, the seminar, moreover, has **three concrete priorities**. The RPW network has made significant contribution in the last years to the growing recognition of public water solutions as key to reaching the MDGs, a recognition that starts to translate into concrete policy change both at the EU (development aid) and the UN level (WOPs). The Brussels seminar is essential for strategising about how to **consolidate and expand** these achievements in the next phase of development of the RPW network. A third major objective is to **integrate broader water resource issues** more strongly in the vision and activities of the network, including assessing how to include in our campaigns a strong integrated vision on water as a global commons.

#### **Expected outcomes:**

- a renewed, deepened and integrated **vision** and analysis for next phase of the network
- common **strategies** for the next 2-3 years, as well as concrete collective work plans including the global advocacy work on the GWOPA and the aid policies of the EU and other donors
- linking up participants for concrete initiatives such as **Public-public partnerships**
- increased momentum for **regional platforms** to promote public-public partnerships, based on the positive experience in the South America region.
- new commitment to coordinated **research, advocacy and other activities** on the global level.
- concrete agreement on working model for the RPW network including coordination and facilitation mechanisms.

#### **Process:**

we have established an **organising committee (OC)** for shaping the programme in depth taking diverse ideas into consideration, for taking initiatives to raise travel funds to participants, for making decision on priority of travel support etc. The first task of the organising committee is to propose thematic working groups based on the programme themes. Thematic WGs will develop and prepare each area of discussion. Suggestions for how the WG can prepare their tasks will be offered by the OC. We will establish a *network taskforce*. The role of the *network taskforce* is to make proposals regarding facilitation and coordination of the RPW network beyond the seminar. The **network taskforce** will coordinate the drafting of a statement for the RPW network, to be finalised on Day 3. The first version of the statement should be prepared in advance but the final version should reflect discussions and consensus developed during the 3 days seminar. Additionally, we consider having "*process facilitators*" for the seminar. *Process facilitators* will ensure that the seminar will proceed as planned and will make adjustments if necessary, if there are some gaps to be filled in. This role might be combined with the *network taskforce*. Such a team should have a good balance of regional representation.