

## **FOREWORD**

### **BACKGROUND**

Due to the ideology-driven privatisation wave, the 1990s was essentially a lost decade for the struggle for clean water for all. The high-profile failure of privatisation in major cities of the south, described elsewhere in this book, provide ample evidence that the water needs of the poor should not be left in the hands of profit-driven, transnational water corporations. Almost without exception, global water corporations have failed to deliver the promised improvements and have, instead, raised water tariffs far beyond the reach of poor households. The rise of grassroots anti-privatisation campaigns in countries around the world, increasingly linked in regional and global networks, is starting to turn the tide against free-market fundamentalism. The time has come to refocus the global water debate on the key question: how to improve and expand public water delivery around the world?

This book is intended to contribute to the achievement of this much-needed shift in the global water debate. While privatisation is no solution, neither is the status quo of often bureaucratised and ineffective, state-run water corporations which, in large parts of the developing world, fail to supply clean water to those that need it. This book provides a wide range of inspiring examples of innovative approaches to public water delivery. Important lessons can be learned from people-centered, participatory public models that are in place or under development in Porto Alegre and Recife (Brazil), for example. In these cities, the public water supply is being improved through increased citizen and user participation as

well as other democratic reforms. In other cities, such as Penang, Malaysia, a rediscovered public service ethos has led to significant improvements in the performance of the utility. Water workers play a key role, to the extent that worker's co-operatives are running the water supplies in cities in Argentina and Bangladesh. In Olavanna (Kerala, India) and Savelugu (Ghana), local communities have taken control to improve water delivery, mobilising their own capacities and local resources.

The motivation to compile this book is that these often-successful experiments have not received the attention they deserve. The challenge to broaden access to clean water to the hundreds of millions of people who need it is such that lessons from these approaches need to be shared. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, there is important information to be found on how to improve and extend public water services, for instance through people-centred participatory processes and inclusion of public utility water workers.

This book also includes chapters on struggles around the world to prevent privatisation and, in some cases, to de-privatise water delivery. These chapters include often elaborate visions developed by anti-privatisation coalitions on making public water work.

### **FROM KYOTO TO PORTO ALEGRE**

The March 2003 World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan, was a defining moment for the international water debate. Civil society groups from around the world spoke out passionately against water privatisation and testified to numerous, dramatic failures of privatisation both in the south and north. These interventions spoiled the attempts by forum organisers, particularly the neo-liberal World Water Council (WWC), to promote

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) as the way forward. The response to the withdrawal of multinational water corporations from the south, argued the WWC, international financial institutions and many northern governments, should be to subsidise the corporations, cover political risks and guarantee profits. Remarkably, there was hardly any mention of the far more obvious way forward: improving and expanding public water supply.

Straight after the World Water Forum, over 100 activists from around the world attended a seminar on alternatives to privatisation. The seminar concluded not only that there are numerous examples of well-functioning public water utilities, but also that a wide range of new innovative approaches has resulted in substantial improvements in public water delivery, not least in the south. Throughout 2003, a concerted effort to advance awareness and debate about public water solutions took shape. After a successful follow-up seminar at the Third World Social Forum in Mumbai, India, in 2004, a joint project was launched involving a diverse coalition of NGO campaigners, grassroots anti-privatisation activists, academics, public utility managers and trade unionists. The [www.waterjustice.org](http://www.waterjustice.org) website was established as a clearinghouse and forum for facilitating discussion. And the decision was made to compile a book, to be published in time for the January 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, with examples of improvements in public water delivery and a special focus on the potential of participation and democratisation.

The focus and format of the book has been shaped through discussions with the authors as well with a large number of advisors. Alberto Villareal, co-author of the Uruguay chapter, stressed that the book could be an important source of inspiration for anti-privatisation activists by providing concrete examples from around the world of both achievements

and ideas for reclaiming public water. The book, indeed, presents a broad range of experiences in an accessible style. Beyond activists, the book is also intended to be a resource for water professionals and water workers. They are in the front-line of the privatisation process and are often bombarded heavily with pro-privatisation messages and pressure. Based on his own experiences as the director of a public water utility, Antonio Miranda, another of the authors, confirmed that the role of citizens' participation in solving urban water problems deserved to be a major focus of the book. Carla Montemayor, a campaigner against the Manila privatisation project, echoed the importance of both these objectives in the light of the urgent need to outline a concrete, public water alternative to convince policy-makers and the wider population of the Philippino capital.

#### **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

The introductory chapter discusses the historical background to the global crisis in water access and why the privatisation wave of the 1990s has failed. This is followed by over 20 chapters which present concrete examples and ideas on how urban water delivery can be improved through democratic public utility reforms. All chapters are written by public water utility managers, civil society activists and others involved first-hand in these efforts. The chapters reflect the experiences and perspectives of the individual authors, which may or may not be shared collectively by the others. Many chapters also have a strong emphasis on the different political, financial and other obstacles which may hinder the success of these approaches. Public water solutions are likely to emerge from, and be shaped by, people's efforts to secure safe and affordable water for all. This was another reason for including a number of chapters on

civil society campaigns against failing privatised water delivery and inadequate state-run water utilities. In the words of one of the authors, Dale T. McKinley of the Anti-Privatisation Forum: "In South Africa, the struggle against water privatisation continues to plant the seeds of an alternative."

Finally, the last chapter of the book attempts to summarise some of the lessons that can be learned from the experiences presented and to identify the main challenges for multiplying these approaches.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

This book is not just a product in itself or simply an intellectual exercise but is part of a continuing process of collective learning, with the aim to empower democratic, equitable public water solutions. It is our sincere hope that this book will be not only a source of inspiration to many around the world, but will also spark further sharing of experiences as well as discussion on each of the key questions addressed. We hope that civil society activists and citizens will increasingly engage in how public services are delivered, and that trade unions will contribute to the discussion and practice of assuring public services that actually serve the poor: This process also has to involve public sector managers and water professionals, many of whom are already engaged in emerging international campaign coalitions for people-centred public water.

Alternatives are our best inspiration to resist the forces trying to hand over our common resources and fundamental human rights to private companies. We hope this book provides useful tools to all those who are striving to stop corporate-driven water privatisation and reclaim our public water.

*The editorial team*