Mapping of alternatives, collective learning, and outreach
Reclaiming Public Water Gathering
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Summary:

The workshop was a space to share information on the various initiatives of RPW network members related to mapping of alternatives, outreach and collective learning, and outreach. These initiatives form part of RPW's long-term strategy to deconstruct the ideology of privatisation and Public-Private Partnerships and aid in bringing conceptual and operational clarity on PuPs, alternatives, and processes of democratisation. It was also a space to discuss ways to reinforce each others' work, develop and establish mechanisms and process for mutual learning, and identify joint future work.

The session had two parts—first, was the sharing of initiatives on the Municipal Services Project, Virtual Course on Water Management and Governance, and other initiatives; second was the discussion on mechanisms, process for mutual learning and joint work.

Main issues discussed:

- The need to continue the work on identifying and publicising alternatives to commercialisation and privatization of water- both for water supply/delivery and the source itself. This includes (a) learning and identifying overlaps of various initiatives such as the Municipal Services Project and Virtual Course; (b) identifying allies such as mass media and tools/strategies to popularise the RPW networks' discourse on alternatives.

- To create and establish a mechanism to have a well-organised and systematic process of collective learning. This includes (a) prioritising the kind of information shared within the network; (b) an effective communication tool to share the information, especially to various audiences and people on the ground; (c) building capacity at the local level in terms of mapping of alternatives, collective learning, and outreach.

Main action points, joint work, and volunteers/leads:

- Strengthen existing and develop and consider new and effective communication strategies for collective learning (Daniel)
  - *Newsletter on alternatives—this is part of the MSP (David)*
  - *Develop a system for organizing the materials and emails such as catalogue, newsletter, wiki, deli.cio.us widget (Martin, Suresh)*

- o *Use available technology such as www.googlewave.com (Ross)*
- o *Create a social wiki on learning across public sectors and the RPW network (Hilary)*
- o *Continue to find ways on how to strengthen existing websites and maximize their use—www.waterjustice.org and remunicipalisation.org (Martin/TNI)*

- Cross-fertilization of initiatives and facilitate the discussion between the MSP, and other RPW network members (David, Mary Ann)
- Recruit course anchors for the Virtual Course (Suresh)
- Prepare for the 2011 World Social Forum as an opportunity for the RPW network
- (Long-term) in terms of popularizing our discourse, tap mass media as an ally and develop contacts (one suggestion is to have a media person for the network)

Network task force

During the workshop, Daniel, Mary Ann, Hilary, Suresh, Martin, and Ross volunteered to be part of the network task force. Others also volunteered including: Renato di Nicola, Anil, Phil, Raffaela, and Buenaventura/Buboy.

List of websites and available resource sites:

www.waterjustice.org

www.remuncipalisation.org

www.municipalservicesproject.org

www.wasser-in-buergerhand.de

www.realworldradio.fm

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1. Initiatives around Mapping of Alternatives, Collective Work and Outreach

The Municipal Services Project or MSP: municipalservicesproject.org *(shared by David and Buenaventura)*

The MSP started in 2000, which initially focused on critiquing commercialisation of water in Southern Africa. But despite the success in critiquing neoliberal policies on water and the shift in policies, the approach was not enough so the project expanded to a new phased and became global. A new phase has started, with Canadian government funding, to look at alternatives in municipal services in the sector of health, power, and water that specifically do not involve the private sector. The water sector is active in its cross-sector communication; not so much for the power/electricity sector.

The MSP works with academics, NGOs, and activists. The main aim is to try to understand what we mean by 'alternatives'? In the current literature, there is no way to compare what is happening in different parts of the world. Even the definition of what 'public' means is different from place to place. The MSP is now looking at the following:

- the different alternatives that exist (historical- e.g. local government alternatives; current; and emerging/proposed);
- how do we characterize (typologies) them and how to determine if they are successful (political criteria);
- clarify the concepts of democracy, public, etc. in different continents; unpacking what we mean by alternatives, and whether they can be reproduced in different parts of the world; and
- gender dimension.

We are currently trying to identify case studies. This is being done with serious academic rigour but we want to work with people on the ground. We do bring methodological frameworks that can help us compare what is happening in Tamil Nadu and Uruguay, for example. This is an opportunity to engage with movements here, to learn from you and feed back into the struggles on the ground.

In Asia, Focus on the Global South and the Visayas State University-Institute for Strategic Research and Development Studies are responsible for doing the mapping exercise for water. We have tried to use scientific rigour in our exercise but we came across many obstacles. The method used was mainly desktop research, but we had to acquire 'renegade literature' from other networks in the Asia region as most reports are not available in English. This is one limitation that is important to keep in mind, if others will embark on a similar mapping exercise. We also have limited access to information in places like rural China. In the urban sector, the information is in the books. But the information about rural water systems is difficult to come by. But despite the difficulty in gathering information on rural water, we found out that not only water services are being commercialised but also sources of water supply and the resource itself. The mapping exercise also covered the forms of alternatives and cooperation between community operations and public sector services as well as factors for the success of such alternatives.

Questions:

On the purpose of the research (raised by Suresh) and target audience- government, policy makers? (raised by Suresh)

David: We are mainly in contrast to policy makers and often clash heads with them. But we have, on occasion, engaged with policy makers as well as people on the ground. We can even progress to the UNDP and other global organisations to shape policy at the global level – this is a key objective.

On the ownership of the project- who owns it? funder-driven? (raised by Suresh) and On ways to participate and help (raised by Daniel)

David: We have ownership of the research. Our site contains all the material. At the moment, the materials are heavy on the critique of commercialisation. We have books, articles, radio productions, newsletters, newspaper articles. We also request people to upload material, including podcasts. It is not, however, just a space to criticise neo-liberalism - we are interested in alternatives. We want to be the 'go-to' website for alternatives to privatisation. We are actively looking for collaborators around the world. We have another 5 years of funding. The difficult part is finding people to do the work internationally. The International Development Research Fund Canada is the funder and it is quite liberal.

On ways and strategies to popularise- e.g. translate to Chinese, develop a

repository of literature (raised by Daniel and Sekou)

Buenaventura /Buboy: We are currently linked with other networks and continuously sharing information. But we believe it should not just be deposited as an academic resource. We have cases in the past whereby information could not be shared digitally because certain members do not have access to electricity! We are looking at the very local alternatives, not all large scale. Many alternatives are for very small local communities who are trying to defend themselves. We looked at the generic characteristics that identified whether something could be a viable alternative. This is a measure to see what causes failure and success. There is also the question of whether indigenous solutions can be part of a commons framework. Regarding the Chinese information, there have been examples of translations, but it is something we are hoping to work on. The same goes for Korea and Japan.

On looking at traditional and indigenous knowledge and scope- only success or failures? (raised by Sekou)

David: We are looking critically at things we have called successes. We want to look critically at the alternatives that are problematic. Having said that, we don't have a predetermined agenda. In regard to indigenous knowledge, we have been predominantly urban focused but we want to engage with the rural areas more.

Virtual Course (shared by Suresh)- see power point presentation

There is an initiative to launch a virtual course that will issue a certificate for water governance in India. During our work, we constantly encounter engineers who said they didn't know any different approach apart from what they are used to and who are not aware of the politics of water. There are also many public officials who genuinely believed privatization was the better option. These people explicitly stated the need to change people's impression that water is a gift of nature. These attitudes are used in the course given to engineers all over the country. We looked at how to reverse this teaching, this trend. So we are looking to partner with other institutions, including UN bodies, to work on these issues outside of the government sphere. We plan to offer a virtual course on water governance. It has been approved by the government of India. The e-course is a nine month course that we hope engineers will be required to take in order to be promoted. All the participants are brought together to share their experiences and learning. The course will be housed at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) housed in Madras and has a standard university structure – modules with courses inside. The modules contain beginner and advanced aspects depending on the previous expertise of the student. There are modules on the economics of water, governance, as well as hydrology. The course is web-based and designed to be interactive. Universities have endorsed the program. The National Programme for Technical E-Learning is hosting the course free of charge. The aim is to have it online with easy access and will include video lectures, etc. We need to look at the possibility of putting people through a system of formal learning without using the certificate. We want the information to be in the public domain, but for the certificate – accredited by the IIT - there must be an evaluation. There has been international interest from all over the world.   In India, many water engineers were saying they wanted a course like this. We are now looking to launch the initiative. The planning of the course is finished. We need 15 course anchors who are both activists and have academic ability – we need this in the next 6 months.

Questions:

On tailor fitting the course to work for young people wanting to work in the sector (raised by John)

Suresh: We want this certificate to also be used for career advancement, yes.

Buenaventura: There is a system in the Philippines of "succession" planning based on certain academic accreditations. People there were interested in such an issue.

On taking the course as a step for promotion and on forcing the political ideology underpinning the course to people (raised by Paddy)

Suresh: We are looking to push an ideology, to reverse the work of international institutions. It is a battle of ideas. We are looking to create a counter 'hegemony'.

On the linguistic challenge and if people without a degree take the course (raised by Fiona)

Suresh: Language is an issue. We are struggling with the English, the Latin Americans are happy to translate it into Spanish. Course fees; there are fees. There needs to be money to run it. We want the anchors to be professionally paid. We are working out the quantities. Shortage of money is not the problem but there is a shortage of meaningful courses. UN system has said they are willing to support it.

On the main target of the course- e.g. can children, who can advance our strategies and discourse, participate? (raised by Sekou)

Suresh: The course is currently geared for water professionals. Offering the course is not enough, we want it to develop and take on a life of its own. The system is versatile and so the course is very flexible. The children aspect is certainly a possibility but at the moment we are focused on the industry.

Other Initiatives

Sebastian: We have a radio station on the Internet working in 4 languages - Realworldradio.fm. It's based on community, NGO, movements and activist testimonies on struggles against privatisation of water, mainly, but also land and seeds, etc. We are trying to move beyond Latin America. All the materials can be downloaded and used by community radio stations.

Hilary: I documented a case of successful struggle against privatization in the UK, based on strong public sector management. Without losing the water focus, maybe we could develop a mutual learning process around the idea of alternatives, across the public sector utilities. This could bring together examples of systematized union or citizen led struggles to learn from what happened.

Jutta: There is a site in Germany. In 2003, movements in 3 areas started a network. (www.wasser-in-buergerhand.de). The site contains the documents and examples of citizens petitions against privatization. Petitions have been successful in preventing privatization. I think it would be useful to look at.

2. **Possible Joint Work, Mechanism to Work Together, and Next Steps**

Mussa: Could there possibly be a course for water activists, of the kind Suresh mentioned? This would serve to connect water activists. RPW should look into this. We need a coordinated way of learning these issues.

Suresh – To Mussa, the system we developed can be adjusted for different groups, and it allows for self-evaluation. We need to find a place to host something like this. We are hoping also to, in the future, put our work on line as case studies as learning materials for others.

Daniel: So how can we cooperate in the ways we have mentioned?

Mary Ann: I think if people monitor the website, that is a great tool for sharing information. As organizers, we want something concrete. We want people to volunteer and commit!

Daniel: How do we stay in touch, beyond just visiting a website? What's the best way to stay involved and keep up to date. Any ideas on this?

David: We want to develop a newsletter, which would cover different sectors.

Mussa: Going back to the course and the organized sharing of info regarding water matters. There are lots of different people in civil society, so lots of people receive a newsletter but see it from different perspectives. It would be productive to develop a foundation of shared knowledge.

Mary Ann: How do people here find the already existing mechanisms and tools that we have?

Suresh: The problem is that people are inundated with information. Is there a way to catalogue these things? So that I don't have to wade through massive amounts of emails?! That would be a good initiative.

Martin: Delicious might be an option – you can tag, catalogue and archive interesting articles. Organising it is easy, but is there interest?

All agree there is interest.

Jutta: And also agenda sharing would be important, so we can work together at events and things like that.

Mussa: There is a need to find a way to organize this information, maybe a newsletter or something like that.

Hilary: Maybe a wiki? Arranged around certain themes.

David: I have a grad student doing a lot of archiving, they could possibly send this info out to the network. Maybe the WSF next year is an opportunity to bring together activists and people working on these things.

Sekou: In terms of alternatives, we can discuss how we want to work with mass media. There is a lot of counter information in this field. We need to help people understand our work – in Mali we work with community radio. They have been a critical voice on these issues.

Daniel: I'd be willing to volunteer to be part of some kind of communications working group to look at knowledge sharing. One other area on the communications front is building capacity at the local level.   RPW may not be the right group for this but

there is certainly a need.

Uwe: I am journalist and it is the wrong approach to prepare material for the media in advance. It is better to create a contact for them, a person they can go to when they want information regarding these things – maybe a press officer for the network.

Mary Ann: We have developed some quite concrete stuff. We need to think about well organized systematic process of learning from each other as well as look at outputs/communications tools.