

Future of Water Movement Session: A Summary

Forum Alternatif Mondial del' Eau

Docks de Suds, Marseilles, France

March 17, 2012 | 9:00-11:00 AM

This summary is an effort to capture the discussion of the session. However, not everything that was said might be reflected in the document. Many of the things said were proposals and are not necessarily wide agreements, commitments or consensus points. This should not be seen as a consensus document but an attempt to record the session and as a reference for future discussions.

Background

The international water movement has been working for several years with important success in bringing solidarity to local struggles and impacting international policy. Broad consensus in significant issues has allowed good communication, support and collaborative efforts around the globe. However, the changing and challenging context compels us to go further in our coordination efforts and collaboration work.

Aim

This session aims to allow a participative discussion about what are our challenges, strengths and priorities as a movement, what can we do together in the short and longer term, what concrete actions we can engage in.

Methodology of the session

The proposed methodology for the session is an adaptation of the “fishbowl”.

There will be a facilitator for this session and 4 additional chairs at the front. For starting off the discussion there will be 3 discussion initiators that will address some of the questions stated below for 7 minutes each. During the session anyone from the public who wishes to participate in the debate may sit on the spare chair and wait for the facilitation to indicate their turn. When the fourth chair is occupied, the person that first spoke will then stand and sit with the audience. This process will be repeated through the session maintaining a spare chair to welcome new interventions. People from the public will have 2 to 3 minutes to comment on what has been discussed previously and/or focus on the questions below.

Towards the end of the session a previously assigned person will give a short summary of the consensus and action points discussed.

Proposed questions to address during the session:

- What are our challenges, strengths and priorities as a movement?
- Is having a diversity of strategies to advance our agenda useful? Are there some strategies that should be prioritized?
- How to bridge the gap and make links between thematic / geographical / local-global issues?
- How do we deal with the new reinventions of water privatization and commodification
- What can we do together in the short and longer term? How do we keep building our common agenda? What concrete actions we can engage in?

SUMMARY

1. Who we are, Why we're Here, Where we are, and What we Do as a Movement:

This section can be summarized with the English phrase, “*Whiskey is for drinking but water is for fighting over*”, which means that the reason why the water justice movements are gathered in Marseilles is because water has become an arena of contestation, of social mobilization and action.

There's a recognition that we work on different issues, we have different campaigns, and we work at various levels—local, national, regional and international. We are struggling against structural problems and against a model of development that puts the market as the arbiter of all values and that makes water an economic and tradeable good, a model that puts profit first before people and the environment. In short, capitalism is destroying our planet and we need to stop this before it's all too late.

We use various strategies and tactics in our campaigns—from legal and legislative means, media to direct actions and other forms. We are aware that various people's campaigns to protect, defend and reclaim water as a commons from around the world, have been criminalized and activists struggling for their rights and lives, killed and harassed by corporations, governments, military and paramilitary groups.

We recognize our diversity but also confront the urgency of concretizing solidarity and working together at the international level.

We come from various movements—the water justice, peasant, women, climate justice, anti-dam, anti-mining, anti-fracking and other extractive industries, youth, and many geographic and thematic networks. But what joins us in this forum is our collective resolve to challenge the commercial World Water Forum and put forward a new vision and culture of water and propose concrete alternatives.

Finally, like water, we as movements flow, travel and connect. We have the capacity to change the dominant discourse of water. We are movements in movement. Change is but only inevitable.

2. Various Issues and Collective Challenges Faced by the Movements

- Privatization is collapsing and we need to reclaim and redefine the dominant discourse and various groups are showing the way, e.g. reclaiming and redefining public water, building and articulating alternatives, i.e. defining what we want in place of privatization.
- New issues that confront us and in which water is at the center of debates:
 - The green economy—need to reclaim our language. Green-washing of the economy rather than a “green economy”
 - New forms of privatization, financialization, and marketization of water including corporatization and the role of international financial institutions such as the World Bank, international capital, hedge funds, speculators, etc.
 - Nexus of food-water-energy and links of land grabbing with water and energy security concerns of governments and corporations
 - Austerity measures in the EU; Euro crisis and how it affects the rest of the world
- In terms of campaigns and social movement building
 - How to roll back the power of TNCs and financial capital
 - How to build a common platform on water-food-energy and understand their linkages and nexus

- How to concretize working together and forging solidarity (e.g. working with the climate justice movement on Rio+20, with the peasant movement, Via Campesina, bridging between North & South etc.)—what will be our common political project and how to move forward?
- How to organically link and promote the important role that women play in water governance and management. Also the special role of the youth as the future of the movement.

3. Strategies and Proposals (Specific and Broad)

This part can be summarized with the Italian Movement's motto, "We read water but we write democracy". This implies that a central strategy the movement uses is active citizenship, social participation, empowering people, and water democracy, which involves committed citizens and people engaging in every step of decision making process on how water should be governed. People's participation is essential, for example, in reclaiming public water services and resources. This also means not leaving the decision making to politicians and elected officials.

More specifically, other strategies/proposals that were mentioned by participants include:

- building local constituencies and ensure that their concerns and sentiments shape international policy agenda, including the movement's agenda and campaigns
- linking the human right to water with other rights such as the right to health and health systems, sanitation, right to food, right of peasants, right of the child, etc. In short, broadening the perspective and framing of water issues.
- continue to collect narratives and experiences/initiatives that rediscover, redefine and reclaim public and community services: link local struggles to regional and international levels in order to change policies of governments and multilateral bodies. This includes promoting appropriate technologies that are community-driven and based.
- need to create a common space, have a common language (e.g. different language games between the activists and public water operators), bridge the divides (thematically, sectorally, language, and geographically) in order to work together but without compromising politics and principles: a key question here, what are our common entry points to work together? (e.g. maybe the Rio+20 process? The UN General Assembly hosting the next water summit?)
- be clear about where we want change to happen and who our common targets are
- important to have regular meetings

Concrete proposals:

- creation of an international water tribunal for the management and resolution of water-related conflicts
- take up the challenge of creating a real African Water Network while trying to resolve certain dynamics and differences in the region
- create an alternative discourse on Rio+20 and oppose how water is being financialized and traded in new forms and ways
- reinforce networks such as the Reclaiming Public Water which is a horizontal, flat, global network of advocates, researchers, public water operators and unions promoting progressive models of public water management
- build an Asia-Pacific network focused on water and tackle problems of distance, multiple languages
- to use Blue October as a moment to coordinate common agenda and messages to strengthen our local struggles

- increase the visibility of progressive public water operators
- look at corruption not only within the IFIs but also locally (e.g. problems of nepotism in public water utilities)
- support anti- bottled water campaigns
- link land grabbing with water grabbing and with investor interests in the water sector and how IFIs and regional development banks play a role here
- link up with other non-water specialists for the Rio+20 process/battle and look at Davos, understand their discourse and present a counter-narrative
- support the European Citizen Initiatives
- support struggles against water as a tool for occupation such as Palestine
- join the regular Thursday call of water justice movement. Language will be a problem but can tackle this with proper preparations.
- Support the Water Caravan journey that will take place in Africa and India to promote ancestral traditions of water management
- commit to fight against the financialization of water, develop concrete strategies on how to do this
- commit to fight and expose the corporate influence in the United Nations
- boycott the next World Water Forum in South Korea and create our own space
- continue to work towards the realization of the human right to water and sanitation and aim for a water summit/Right to Water Summit under the auspices of the UN in 2014.

4. Political Calendar

April - World Bank Spring meetings, NGOs holding side events

1 April - launch of first European Citizen's Initiative on the human right to water (European Public Services Union, EPSU)

17 April - Day against Land Grabbing (organized by Via Campesina)

5-6 May – Corporate Europe Observatory, CEO/Transnational Institute, TNI meeting in Brussels on the EU financial crisis

3-4 May/ 7-8 May - EU Financialization of Nature meeting in Brussels around CEO/TNI event

15-19 May - Block the ECB (European Central Bank), Action to Occupy Frankfurt

5 June - National mobilizations on RIO+20 to prepare awareness locally

20 June - Global Action Day against the commodification of water (& nature) & the green economy in the framework of RIO+20 Peoples' Summit

Blue October - an international month of action to challenge corporate control of water and to protect water as a commons

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