

PROMOTING ALTERNATIVES, BUILDING SOLUTIONS

BLUE PLANET PROJECT MOVES FROM RESISTANCE TO CREATION

Anil Naidoo coordinates the Blue Planet Project, the Council of Canadians' international water campaign. He recently sat down with Ariel Troster, Editor of *Canadian Perspectives*, to reflect on how activists from around the world are working to promote access to affordable, equitable and publicly managed water.



Photo: Marcela Olivera

Ariel Troster: From your perspective, how has the international water justice movement grown and changed over the last few years?

Anil Naidoo: When the Blue Planet Project was founded five years ago, the movement was almost solely focused on opposing and resisting the agenda of privatization and commodification of water. Now, the Blue Planet Project is working with international partners to combat those trends of corporate control, while also promoting concrete alternatives.

AT: What kind of alternatives are you proposing?

AN: "Alternatives" mean different things in different places. The people of Cochabamba, Bolivia, chose a water system

In April 2005, Maude Barlow joined people in El Alto, Bolivia, who are fighting to re-establish control over their water system.

that involves community members in the management of the utility. Porto Alegre, Brazil, instituted participatory budgeting as a more democratic means of decision making. The government in Penang, Malaysia, revived its public system by incorporating more feedback and expertise from workers.

In many ways, it's less about proposing alternatives than it is about presenting workable options for communities. We will bring experts and campaigners together at a conference in November in Spain, to develop a range of options for communities to finance water systems without relying on private corporations.

AT: What challenges do you face in documenting and promoting these community-centred solutions?

AN: You can't just pick one example and say that this is the model that's going to work for everyone. Through the Water Justice Project, we've set up an interactive website, where we can create an inventory of examples of resistance toward privatization and alternatives from around the world. We hope this will help people develop the solutions that are right for their community.

AT: Why is it so important to promote these solutions?

AN: I look at every water privatization scheme as a future failure, because time and time again, this is what we're seeing. Will tariffs increase so much that diseases that have been eradicated for a hundred years come back? Will the corporation itself leave, because it decides it can't make a profit? People are going to have to pick up the pieces, and create a system that works for them – otherwise a system will be imposed on them.

This is why you need to move from resistance to creating something with a strong, sturdy foundation. It's not good enough to simply give people a choice between a poorly run public system and a private system that's run for profit.

Check out www.waterjustice.org for examples of alternatives to water privatization, and www.blueplanetproject.net for more information on the Blue Planet Project's campaign for a treaty on the right to water.

Ariel Troster is the Publications Officer at The Council of Canadians, and the Editor of *Canadian Perspectives*.