



Application Form submitted by the initiatives to participate in the Transformative Cities People`s Choice Award

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Location:	Lagos, Nigeria
Title of the Transformative Initiative:	The Lagos Our Water Our Rights Campaign
Name of organization:	Environmental Rights Action (ERA) – Friends of the Earth Nigeria
Type of organization:	Environmental rights NGO
Website:	www.erafoen.org
Category and Edition:	WATER. Transformative Cities Award 2 nd edition (2019).
STORYTELLING	
Summary	
<p>The Our Water Our Rights Campaign has, for over five years, been mobilizing communities to resist water privatisation and had broadened citizen’s engagement in resolving the Lagos water crisis.</p>	
Context and problem definition	
<p>The estimated population of Lagos is 21 million people at a growth rate of 6-8 percent annually. The United Nations recently estimated that Lagos will become the ninth largest megacity in the world.</p> <p>Lagos is surrounded by water but acute water shortage and poor sanitation are major challenges facing residents of the city. The Lagos Water Supply Masterplan estimates daily water demand in the city at 540 million gallons per day (MGD) with total production capacity by the Lagos State Water Corporation (LSWC) currently at an abysmal less than 210 MGD.</p>	

This shortfall has compelled about 60 per cent of the residents to resort to unwholesome sources, including private water vendors at the risk of water-borne diseases such as cholera, dysentery, diarrhea, among others.

The task of ensuring households get water for domestic and other uses usually fall on women and the youth who most times go to long distances to get water. Unfortunately, in fashioning solutions to the Lagos water crisis, this segment of the population is ignored as the Lagos government has over the years resorted to donor suggestions and loans with slave conditions that do not have the support of the citizenry.

Design and Initiation

In 2014, we (ERA) found out, through information from the US based organisation Corporate Accountability International, that the Lagos government had been secretly negotiating with the World Bank about a public private partnership structure (a form of privatisation) of its public water resources. The government had not released any information about these negotiations and citizens and organisations had been left in the dark.

When we found out about the negotiations, we decided to start our own investigation. We turned to the government to ask for more information. We wanted the government to engage Lagos citizens on how to solve the Lagos water crisis which bothered on lack of public consultation and cases of corruption which the state had failed to address. We felt water privatization would further worsen the water crisis as it would put our water infrastructure in the hands of for-profit-only corporations. However, the government refused to reply to our requests. In response, we realized we needed to build a broader coalition in order to address the impact of the government's plans.

We contacted a range of organisations to start building a campaign, including: Civil liberties Organisation, Peace and Development Project, Committee Defence of Human Rights(CDHR), Health of Mother Earth Foundation(homef), Nigeria Labour Congress(NLC), Women Arise, Centre for Dignity, Cares Foundation Nigeria, Child Health Organisation, Nigeria, Social Action, Earth Care Foundation, Community Defence Law Foundation, Journalists For Democratic Rights, Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre, Nigeria, Media Support Centre, Climate Aid Initiative, Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre.

Having formed this broad social coalition, the challenge was to mobilise citizens and communities. This would entail not only making people aware of the government's plans to privatize the water utilities, but also to educate them about what these privatisations would imply. Our aim was to stop all privatisation plans, provide better solutions to deal with the water crisis and achieving recognition for water as a basic human right.

Implementation

The Our Water Our Rights campaign used the example of the failed privatization of the waste system to highlight the problems with privatizing water. The campaign targeted the company Visionscape, who had the contract for waste management in Lagos and also a PPP for Water. People posted photos on social media to show how dirty their streets had become since privatization. The Visionscape waste contract was terminate, and the government has taken over control of waste management again.

In January 2019 a National Water Summit was held in Abuja with over 100 participants from across the country and Africa. This was an important gathering in which people and movements could learn from each others strategies, successes and failures. The campaign used this meeting to build a national campaign for the right to water and established and an African Water Justice Network.

The Our Rights, Our Water campaign has also focused on the Lagos governor elections that occurred in March 2019, in which the current governor who promoted water privatization was not chosen to run again in part because of controversy over water management. While the new governor is also pro-water privatization the campaign will seek to influence him quickly and is planning a townhall meeting on March 25th and the launch of new video on world water day.

We started organizing meetings throughout all the different communities in Lagos, in order to educate people about the government's plans and their implications. By learning from water privatisation cases in other countries (through research by organisations such as TNI) we were able to show these communities what could happen if the water would be privatized in Lagos. This way, across Lagos, we were able to engage 30 different communities during our campaign.

The communities became the prime voice in our campaign. Whereas communities had previously never been consulted for policy plans by the government, we built our campaign around their voices. We took numerous testimonies from people about their experiences with water shortages, contaminated water and their difficulties (especially for women and children who are often charged with the task of getting drinking water). These stories became the main focus of the campaign, which focused on the increasing scarcity in case of privatisation, the human right of access to water and the viable alternatives to both water privatisation and the current government's way of distributing water resources.

The communities also became key actors in the decision making process regarding our actions towards the government. The campaign was completely grassroots focused, which meant that communities were always the source of decision-making before engaging in peaceful public protests or corresponding with the government. This was institutionalized through the Our water Our Rights Coalition.

One of the most vivid examples of our campaign was in the beginning of this year, when the government was (secretly) drawing up an all-encompassing environmental law, in which certain paragraphs were dedicated to access to water. Those paragraphs stated that the transferring of water between buildings or from the river to someone's house or from one building to the other as a form of assistance to those in need, would be forbidden. This measure would basically criminalise the transportation of water; measures that paved the way for privatisation.

After finding out about these plans, we contested them in a public hearing, in which we, again, provided alternatives to privatisation to the government. Subsequently, we mobilized all the different communities and organisations in order to march through the streets against these measures. These pressures finally led to the government eliminating the contested paragraphs.

Nonetheless, the privatisation plans are still on the government's agenda. Our campaign continues to move forward until our goal of water as a constitutionalized human right is achieved.

Results achieved and Evaluation

The Our Water Our Right campaign has raised the profile of issues the community in relation to water delivery, including broken pipes that had not been fixed for almost a decade and the Lagos State Water Corporation (LWC) promised to rehabilitate the facility. After the campaign's pressure and visit we were able to confirm that pipes and water works were repaired.

Currently, the government still has privatization plans, which we keep contesting with our campaign. However, in the past three years, we have already achieved a number of important results during our struggle.

The first tangible result of our campaign was that the government canceled the contract it had with the World Bank as an advisor in the privatisation scheme. This has at least slowed down the process of privatisation.

A second concrete result is that because of our campaign, the former Group Managing Director of the Lagos State Water Corporation (LSWC), Engr. Shayo Holloway, has been fired. Holloway was the face of the government's privatisation plans, and we have proved and exposed his and his organisation's mismanagement and widespread corruption.

Third, as previously stated, a very big success has been that the government has now reserved 185 million dollars in its budget for clean water access.

Another result of our efforts is that the campaign has, for the first time since the end of the military regime, united so many different organisations, social movements and communities in Lagos under one message. Our campaign has spurred a national movement against water privatisation. This has, in turn, created a much broader awareness of the concept of privatisation and its impacts.

Political Strategies

The Our Water Our Rights campaign worked with international partners to raise pressure on campaigns and the government. This included having a group of US senators write a joint letter in support of the campaign and working with French NGOS to target and understand more about Veolia.

From the onset of the campaign, we managed to link our struggles to other anti-privatisation struggles in the world. In collaboration with international partners, we wrote the report Lagos Water Crisis: Alternative Roadmap for Water Sector. This evidence-based document became our key advocacy tool in our correspondence with the government.

Our political strategies were thus focused on two paths: on the one hand, we provided the government with evidence-based research concerning the negative implications of water privatisations and on the other hand, in order to put pressure and gain (international) support for our campaign, we organized rallies and protests in collaboration with the communities. Since water privatisation is a 'hot' issue that affects us all, it was not difficult for us to get broad media coverage for our struggle. In the beginning of the campaign, we organized a meeting for 25 journalists, in which we educated them about water privatisation, PPP's and its impacts. During our meetings with the different communities, these journalists came with us, and reported about the people's testimonies.

Through both traditional and social media we got a lot of attention both in Lagos and in other countries, which put more pressure on the government. The widespread media attention also spurred protest mobilisations and petition signings.

In order to learn and engage with international partners struggling with the same issues, we organised the first Lagos Water Summit, with national and international attendees. Through this summit, we managed to carry our struggle to an international level and a global movement.

The popular pressure from the communities in Lagos and the international attention to our cause, combined with the evidence-based research we produced in collaboration with (international) partners, have provided us with all the necessary tools to influence the government's policies most effectively.

Related legislations

The most successful consequence of our campaign in terms of governmental policies has been that since this year, 185 million dollars of the government's budget has been allocated to ensuring clean water for people. Beforehand, the government used to say that no funding for this was available and that the only way to raise funds was by public private partnerships. With our campaign, we have exposed this was not true and demanded the government to assign more public funding to this cause.

Lessons learned

We have already learned many lessons during this campaign. First of all, throughout the campaign, we have learned about the value and strength of grassroots, bottom-up movements. In order to build a coalition and gain support, it is essential that initiatives come from the peoples that are most affected. The participatory aspect of the entire campaign has been an inspiring process.

Besides organizing the movement around participatory engagement, we have learned about the strength of global partnerships. Through cooperation with organisations such as TNI and PSI, we have been able to collect extremely valuable information regarding water

privatisations in other countries. These partnerships have resulted in our key advocacy document towards our government.

The importance of such documents has been another key lesson for us. We have learned that besides protesting and objecting current or future government plans, it is extremely important to be able to provide alternatives. By using research documents that we established in cooperation with our local and international partners, and sending these to all governmental key policy makers, we were able to fight the privatisation plans with reason. This way, we showed the government and the media that we did not only criticize, but were able to provide solid solutions.

Lastly, when it comes to the radical activism aspect of the campaign, we have learned a lot from our global partnership about organizing peaceful but meaningful rallies and protests.

EXTRA INFO

Supporting documents

<https://www.independent.ng/lagos-residents-use-tainted-water-cry-help/>

<http://www.vironewsigeria.com/campaigners-flay-hasty-passage-lagos-environment-law/>

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lagos-water-crisis-bill-nigeria_us_58c8b63ce4b01c029d7758b7

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/water-bill-nigeria-revised_us_58d246b1e4b02d33b746e817

<http://www.vironewsigeria.com/applause-lagos-discards-anti-people-sections-environment-law/>