

The Fight for Water

- *This personal opinion was originally written in Danish by Jørgen Olsen, coordinator of the Danish member association of Emmaus, Genvej til Udvikling (= GtU = Short Cut to Development) + member of the World Council for Political Actions and International Solidarity of Emmaus International*
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www.u-landsnyt.dk/blog/51/kampen-om-vandet
- *Translated into English by Kristian Katholm Olsen.*

2013 is UN's year of cooperation for utilization of water. The 22nd of March is the day on which we to a particular extent are encouraged to think about water. The EU Commission works persistently to accomplish a total liberalization of water utilization.

Before the renovation of wells in the Amatal Zone in the Sahel Belt of Niger in the beginning of the millennium more than every four births ended with the deaths of both mother and child – so polluted was the water from the wells, which were propped up by wood. The renovations caused improved lives for humans and animals - before its implementation the word “water” was the mostly used word in the conversations between the local cooperative and the emissaries of GtU.

As of 2007 our mother network, Emmaus International, is engaged somewhere else in West Africa with a massive focus on a water and sanitation project. While Amatal is situated in a distinctly dry area the Nokoué project is run in an area with enormous amounts of water which is completely undrinkable – Nokoué is the name of the lagoon in the south of Benin which you can see at the far majority of the maps of Africa. Around the lagoon and on stilts in the water live the Toffins who are former slave peoples, in a number of about 70.000.¹

EI tries together with local organizations and authorities to give clean water to all of them by drilling far enough down. This goes simultaneously with an intensive work of organizing the population into administration committees. Read more: http://emmaus-international.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=157&Itemid=129&lang=english

Water is an indispensable precondition of life and dirty water results in a frail life. Because of this UN recommended on its general assembly in 2011 that governments worldwide have a duty to offer their populations clean drinking water.

¹ After the release of the opinion some new information made clear that:

- The number of the Toffin people is probably around 125.000 in total.
- The Toffin people have not been taken as slaves to a great extent – they live at the banks of the lake or on stilts within the lake, because they fled in order to avoid being captured as slaves. They mainly live by fishing.

Despite of this the EU Commission wants to get through with a total liberalization of water and sanitation on the basis of the idea that this should give better and cheaper service. A European citizen initiative has opposed to this formulated the point of view that clean water is a human right and that the proposed liberalization has to be avoided.

The citizen initiative considers that liberalization only will give rich people better and cheaper service, leaving expensive and bad water to the poor. Europe's attitude will have a significant signaling effect when it comes to handling in other continents and when it comes to international cooperation about water utilization.

The citizen initiative has its origin in the European Federation of Public Service and is backed by a large number of European and international organizations, among them European Anti-Poverty Network, European Public Health and others.

The citizen initiative has started a petition in EU's member states which urges governments and local authorities to put clean drinking water and sanitary conditions to the citizen's disposal, so the offer is available, practicable, economically affordable and acceptable for all. The citizen initiative proposes a progressive price setting, so the liter price goes up, the more you use – this will be an incentive to for an example not to wash the car every single day, and simultaneously the more necessary use of water will be a possibility for everyone.

Read more: <http://www.right2water.eu/faq>