



TOGETHER, MORE THAN EVER,
LET'S FIGHT TO CHANGE THE WORLD!

RIGHT TO WATER: WHAT ARE OUR FUTURE ACTIONS AND DEMANDS?



At the 2003 World Assembly, the movement denounced the privatisation of water and other basic services which are essential to our health and education, calling on people to actively defend these rights. In 2006, this idea was transformed into concrete action when Emmaus International started its programme for access to water on Lake Nokoué in the south of Benin. The local people, via their local Emmaus group, called out to our movement and made us aware of their shocking reality: only 10% of the 70,000 people living by Lake Nokoué had access to drinking water and only 2% had access to proper sanitation. We then started to work together to launch the Solidarity for Water on Nokoué project (PCSEN). This project wasn't just about providing access to water and sanitation for the people living in the lake area, it was also about creating an association so that the users could set up a public, citizen-led management of their water infrastructure. The political ambition of this project was that the local people would gain both access to water and an awareness of their legitimacy to demand access to their rights at the same time.

I. WHY AND HOW WAS THIS DOCUMENT DRAWN UP?

In 2017 the movement launched an in-depth evaluation process in order to look at the current status of the Solidarity for Water on Nokoué project (PCSEN), to analyse whether or not this pilot project allowed the most excluded to take action in order to gain access to their rights, especially the right to water, and to consider how the movement could use this project to help build a more collective, international political voice on the topic of access to water.

II. WHICH WORLD ASSEMBLY DEBATE DOES THIS REFER TO?

This document is intended to help you to prepare for the following debate, as outlined in the guidance report for 2021-2025 which you should have received by now:

Subject 4: Why and how can we take action and speak out together?

How have our joint initiatives helped us to tackle the causes of poverty?

How can we go further and make our demands known?

What struggles should the movement engage in for the future, given the democratic and ecological challenges, and faced by the exacerbation of the inequalities and forms of racism directed at migrants in particular?

III. PRESENTATION OF THE DOCUMENT

Analysis





One of the key objectives of Emmaus International's pilot initiatives was to enable the most excluded to take time to think, to organise themselves and create their own set-up for demanding access to their rights. For the PCSEN project, water was available but the problem was creating access to the lake water, making it drinkable, managing it and providing sanitation services. A lack of toilets in homes and the disposing of animal carcasses and waste led to high levels of water pollution in the lake.

The project was launched thanks to a request from the local people: an association of fishermen called the Sonagnon association contacted the local Emmaus group, Emmaus Pahou, who then submitted the proposed project to Emmaus International. During the first phase, we focused on two pilot sites in the Lake Nokoué region, Ahomey-Gblon and Gbessou. The positive results of this first phase encouraged us to go ahead with phase two: launching at 7 sites across the district of Sô-Ava. Our action as part of the PCSEN project was based around four main activities:

- Access to drinking water
- Access to sanitation
- Promotion of good hygiene
- Capacity building

The PCSEN project had a very positive impact on the local people. In 2011, just 10% of the local people across the 7 sites had access to drinking water. Thanks to this project, this figure increased to 61%. It also led to the creation of 84 toilet blocks (336 latrines in total) across the 7 sites, reducing certain very prevalent diseases.

The evaluation process launched in 2018 helped us to identify many of the project's strengths. This pilot scheme enabled us to reinforce the local people's ability to take action in many different ways. The project went beyond the topic of access to water, focusing on the capacity of the people of Sô-Ava to take action on the topic of access to water and sanitation services. The philosophy of this project was to avoid taking over the role of the people who are involved in a process of social change and instead give them the means to achieve their aims.

One way of doing this was to create a users' association. The association brought together people living in situations of poverty, who had a low level of literacy and were living in an isolated community to manage the AUAEAN (the association of the users and stakeholders of the Nokoué water and sanitation) project. From the outset, this meant that the members had to attend regular meetings and hold debates before they could take any final decisions. It was clearly outlined in this association's statutes that women must be involved and this was a sign of progress, bearing in mind the local and national context for women. The community management approach led by the AUAEAN also introduced the concept of solidarity to this area, a notion which had not been very prevalent in the past.

Generally speaking, the project focused on listening to the needs of the local people and building their capacities. PCSEN also relied on local knowledge and know-how thanks to a preliminary study and the two-year long pilot phase of the project. Debate sessions, training sessions and sessions focusing on how to properly share speaking time were offered to all those who wished to get involved in the project. This approach was in contrast to the majority of public policies in the area which seek to dissuade citizens from taking part in public life. By strengthening public services and letting the people



who use these services manage things themselves, the PCSEN project resulted in marginalised people becoming more active citizens. This approach had significant political importance. The project's stakeholders were committed to guaranteeing the right to water for people in poverty situations, but they were also very careful about how this was done. The focus was not purely on concrete results, but also on ensuring that the right means and methods were being used as part of this project. This participatory, inclusive approach helped to strengthen the community spirit and ensure the users were more involved in managing their water.

The local people were not the only vulnerable groups who were able to participate in this project. Emmaus International also allowed members of the movement to get involved. Several international camp events were organised in the region, allowing companions, friends of the movement and group leaders to come to Lake Nokoué and learn more about the project by working side by side with the local people. The presence of various Emmaus communities and groups from across the globe brought a sense of sharing and joint action led by poor populations to this initiative. This led, for example, to greater sharing of information amongst the Emmaus groups on the topic of access to rights. Such events were not just held by the lake itself; the inhabitants of the lake were also invited to events hosted by various Emmaus communities in France, Spain and Germany. When it was first launched, this project had a real impact in that a lot of our movement's members, notably the most excluded, were able to really get involved in a large-scale joint project.

Proposals

We are currently facing certain challenges with this project: a lack of human resources and management capabilities within the AUAEAN remain key challenges to monitoring the project and building capacity amongst the different groups of users. It is also essential that we build capacity amongst the operators for the maintenance of the water treatment and pumping sites. There is a risk that the infrastructure for the project could be seized, especially if the local population lacks the necessary tools and capabilities to manage the infrastructure themselves. Two proposals are made to the movement in this regard:

- **Providing support for good governance of the association of the inhabitants of the lake**
- **Looking into whether or not it would be relevant for the AUAEAN to become an Emmaus group**

Furthermore, the project's long-term future is threatened by the costs related to some of the infrastructure, notably the electricity generator. One of the main options for the future of this project is to move on to solar energy. This would help us to reduce the costs involved in producing electricity with the generator and most importantly it would help reduce the environmental footprint of our project in a local context where the lake is highly polluted and bearing in mind Emmaus International's struggle for environmental and climate justice. One proposal is made to the movement in this regard:

- **Helping the programme move towards financial independence: using our international solidarity programmes to have solar energy panels installed on the sites which are not yet equipped with this technology**



Another challenge for the future is to show the capacity of the most excluded to organise themselves to implement long-term solutions and lead political campaigning initiatives based around this pilot programme. Since the early days of the Nokoué programme, the stakeholders have tried to include political campaigning in this citizen-led initiative, but attempts to lobby the local and national authorities have not been wholly successful and the various government departments remain suspicious about the project and about our approach. Furthermore, Emmaus International has not communicated much about the Nokoué programme within the movement over the last few years. And yet the PCSEN project could represent an example of many lessons learned that we could discuss as part of our political stance. In addition, our first global report on our fight against poverty sets out the following demand for our movement, “protecting fundamental rights by promoting the collective management of the commons” and the Nokoué programme would be a perfect example of how Emmaus does this.

It may be a good idea to strengthen our political voice and our collective mobilisation on this topic given that this vital resource, water, is closely linked to several other environmental, socio-economic and geopolitical concerns.

One proposal is made to the movement with regard to this challenge:

- **Building our political voice on the topic of the right to water and ensuring that the Emmaus groups lead advocacy initiatives on this topic**