

# **Community mobilization guide for the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week**

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# Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week: a brief history
3. Proposal for the organization of the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week
  - 3.1. Proposed stages
  - 3.2. Suggested activities
  - 3.3. Checklist to organize activities
4. Other successful experiences in the Region

Annex: Summary of the Inter-American Water Day celebration (1992-2000)

# 1. Introduction

Most of the Earth surface is water. But only 2% is fresh water and most of it is in the poles, frozen, or in very deep ground deposits. Less than 1% corresponds to fresh water that can be economically used by men without generating major negative impacts on the environment. Although water constitutes an essential input for human life it is extremely scarce.

Despite this shortage, water resources available are sufficient to meet human needs. Water distribution among regions, however, is unequal, water demand is continuously increasing, and its pollution is a concern.

Water consumption has been multiplied by six in a century while population has grown three times. While in 1950 water consumption amounted to 1,360 cubic kilometers per year, in 1990 it reached 4,130 and for the year 2000, more than 5,000 cubic kilometers were predicted.

According to the United Nations data, 80 countries are currently affected by lack of water. In 25 Middle East and North Africa countries chronic water scarcity produces permanent struggles and conflicts. It is likely that the main cause of conflicts in the future will no longer be oil nor the conquest of new territories but lack of fresh water.

A recent report prepared by the Government of the United States highlights 10 planet sites where the struggle for controlling fresh water sources could originate local conflicts in the short term. Mexico City surroundings face serious problems due to lack of water sources, since regional lakes covering four thousand square kilometers have dried up or are polluted. Due to this shortage, the population must look for water in more distant places, which significantly increases the cost of the supply service.

In China, where fifth of the world's population live and less than tenth of the water of the planet is concentrated, 35% of the artesian wells have already dried up. According to predictions of more than 500 technicians from 60 countries that participated in the Water Congress held in Stockholm in 1993, during the next 50 years the subsurface currents that supply drinking water to the countries of the European Union (EU) will be highly polluted by agricultural pesticides, industrial chemicals, and filtration from waste dumps. A study conducted by the EU indicates that groundwater constitutes the main source of drinking water supply in Denmark (100%), Italy (85%), Germany (75%), France (60%), and Spain (34%).

It is impossible to imagine a human activity without water presence. Life –either human, animal, or vegetable– cannot be sustained without water. Human body is mainly formed by aqueous solutions where dissolved substances are mixed. In these aqueous solutions different chemical reactions are produced. Water represents 40 to 80% of the total person weight.

Agriculture is the human activity that requires 93.4% of the total fresh water. But according to Unesco data, less than 20% of that percentage reach the plants. The remaining part is wasted and most of it contains pollutants that inevitably end up in rivers. On the other hand, agriculture loses an average of 70% of water.

Water needs for livestock and farming vary according to the species and environment where these economic activities take place. Worldwide, it is calculated that herds need approximately 60 billion liters per day and according to the United Nations predictions, this demand may grow approximately 400 million liters in the coming years.

Industry is another large water consumer; it uses 3.8% of the total and loses 20% during its processes. The problem of water source degradation occurs when industrial wastes are disposed of in natural courses. Since 1950, industrial water consumption in the United States has diminished 36% per unit of product. In Germany, consumption has remained

constant for 20 years, while production has increased 44%. In Japan, consumption has been reduced in 24%.

The remaining percentage of water around the world, after satisfying agricultural and industrial needs, is used for human consumption. Municipalities consume 2.7% of the total. The disposal of this consumption also affects the environment. Local governments lose approximately 10% of water. Nowadays, pollution caused by sewerage constitutes the main cause of poor river conditions, in addition, it is the transmission source of diseases such as dengue, cholera, and diarrhea.

Those diseases, known as water-borne diseases, are responsible for more than 65% of hospital admissions in developing countries and approximately 80% of admissions and 30% of deaths of children under 1 year old.

Cholera, a bacterial-origin disease considered eradicated, appeared in 1991 with a serious epidemic that started in Peru. Since that year, 391,000 cases have been registered in America and 19,295 were fatal.

Diarrheal diseases caused more than 3 million deaths worldwide in 1995, nearly 80% were children under 5 years old.

The main source of surface water pollution is direct disposal of domestic wastewater, which generates potential health risks to people living in densely populated areas. Groundwater pollution is due mainly to infiltration of excreta from septic tanks, sewerage networks with poor maintenance, lack of sanitation service coverage, and infiltration of toxic compounds from industrial wastes and sanitary landfills. Regarding the latter, the concern is even greater because approximately 50% of the urban and rural population of Latin America uses groundwater for drinking and irrigation.

The most pollutant economic activities are industry, mining, oil, and agriculture. Mining pollution is quite intense in Latin American countries. Mining pollutants are heavy metals, acids, suspended solids, and hydrocarbons close to extraction points, pipeline leaks, and aquatic transportation means. Agriculture pollutes water by infiltration, rainfall, uncontrolled drainage, fertilizers, and pesticides.

Water is a priceless good. Besides being an essential element for production and a strategic resource for economic development, it is vital for maintaining the biological, geological, and chemical cycles that guarantee the equilibrium of the ecosystem. Furthermore, it is an indispensable good for the survival and life quality of the population.

Water is not only a vital input for the survival of living beings but a source of beauty and landscape harmony. It is a space appropriate for leisure time, recreational activities, and for practicing several sports. Fishing is also an important economic activity since it is a source of proteins for the population.

But water is exhaustible. The United Nations considers that in 20 years, water shortage will be the main ecological and political problem of humankind. Hence, there is an increasing concern to protect water and other environmental inputs that have not received proper attention.

World crisis figures cited in the book *Pilares de Areia: Pode o Milagre da Irrigação Continuar?*, by Sandra Postel should be considered. She states that the first result of water scarcity can be a reduction of approximately 10% of world food production, which would aggravate hunger and cause "civil preoccupation and even local wars." Her argument is based on the fact that if irrigation performance does not improve, larger productive regions will not have sufficient water to maintain their production. One threat is excessive aquifer pumping.

However, according to Postel, not everything is lost. An alternative is the use of direct drip irrigation in the plant root, which can reduce water consumption between 30 and 70%.

Farmers from the United States and Europe are already applying these and other innovations with a productivity up to 90%. In Malaysia, rice producers reduced water losses to half using proper irrigation.

Other more lasting revolution is promoted by institutions of several countries. The revolution implies a change of vision based on the importance of water and other natural goods for life preservation in the planet. Those involved in the consolidation of this new vision think that water preservation will only be guaranteed when the population becomes aware of its strategic importance.

To change the vision, the population should become aware of the importance of water for life preservation. One initiative that may contribute to that task is the creation of the Inter-American Water Day. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Inter-American Association of Sanitary Engineering (AIDIS), and the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA) signed in 1992 the Declaration of the XII Inter-American Congress of AIDIS in Havana (Cuba) and created the Inter-American Water Day, to be celebrated every first Saturday of October.

From the beginning of this celebration, Latin American communities have reacted positively. In 1994, the First Inter-American Water Week was celebrated in the State of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil. This idea was also adopted by other countries of the Latin American and the Caribbean Region. The Brazilian experience has been very interesting and marked by creativity and capacity to mobilize different sectors of the population. Thus, part of that experience is described for the benefit of groups engaged in the preservation of water resources in other countries of the Region.

The key objective of this work is to submit a social mobilization proposal on water advocacy and preservation based on the experience of Rio Grande do Sul. We think that different agencies and institutions interested in raising community awareness on the importance of water will consider this material as a source of inspiration and a practical guide for improving their daily tasks in their localities.

## CHART 1 FOR THIS SECTION

### What do figures say?

Millions of cubic kilometers of water in the planet .....	1,386
Millions of cubic kilometers of fresh water .....	35
Cubic kilometers of fresh water, including lakes and rivers (in thousands) .....	93
Percentage of Latin America and the Caribbean population without access to drinking water nor sewerage system .....	27
Annual water consumption registered in 1950 (in cubic kilometers) .....	1,360
In 1990 .....	4,130
Consumption expected for the 2000 .....	5,000
Percentage of wastewater discharged with pretreatment in Latin America and the Caribbean.....	10
Dollars spent per person/year for water disinfection .....	1
Percentage of hospital admissions due to water-borne diseases (such as dengue, cholera and diarrhea) in developing countries .....	65
Percentage of deaths of children under 1 year old due to water-borne diseases in developing countries .....	30
Total of cholera cases registered in Latin America since 1991 .....	391,000
Total of fatal cholera cases .....	19,295
Millions of deaths worldwide caused by diarrheal diseases in 1995 .....	3
Percentage of those deaths that corresponded to children under 5 years old .....	80
Percentage of children deaths that, according to scientific reports, can be reduced by combining drinking water and basic sanitation with education .....	55
Approximate percentage of water production lost in the capital of Peru due to leaks, according to the Servicio de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado de Lima .....	40
Kilograms of agricultural toxic substances required to pollute one billion liters of water .....	1
Reduction of water meters per year in Northern China between 1991 and 1996 .....	1.5
Liters of water consumed approximately in a shower .....	90
In an immersion bath .....	350
In car washing without closing the faucet .....	150
In teeth washing without closing the faucet .....	6
Average of daily liters of water consumed per person in Europe .....	150
In the United States .....	300
In India .....	25

## CHART 2 FOR THIS SECTION

### Did you know that...?

- The United Arab Emirate Government calculates that in 2010, water demand in the country will have tripled, which will urge major investments in desalinization plants and better use of existing reserves.
- According to a report of the World Commission on Water for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, more than half of the largest rivers in the world are diminishing its flow or are being contaminated.
- From the above study it was deduced that among the 500 largest rivers of the world, only the Amazonas in South America and the Congo in Africa are still in good conditions. Nevertheless, the use and overexploitation of those sources are growing, which can lead to depletion and pollution.
- The Yellow River, one of the most important of China, is seriously contaminated and its flow has declined in various sections.
- The Aral Sea, in Russia, has a constant level of reduction due to drastic decrease of its affluents, which contain toxic substances from agriculture.
- The Colorado river, that irrigates more than 1.47 million hectares in the United States, is being overexploited and contaminated by agricultural activities.
- More than 90% of the Nile river, the largest of the world, is used for irrigation and water supply, which causes an immense loss by evaporation and diverts large quantities of agricultural pollutants and domestic wastewater toward the Mediterranean Sea.
- In Costa Rica, the Rio Grande de Tárcoles is vital for 60% of the population, but throughout its course, it receives great quantity of wastewater discharged without pretreatment. In many neighborhoods of San José, the capital, debris are discharged into the river. Fortunately, local governments, private enterprises, and the civil society have become more aware of its preservation.

### CHART 3 FOR THIS SECTION

#### Sequels to polluted water

In many countries of Latin America, water-borne diseases are very common and are increasing morbidity and mortality rates.

Water-borne diseases have various origins and are caused mainly by bacteria, virus, or parasites.

- Main water-borne diseases caused by bacteria
  - ◆ Typhoid and paratyphoid fevers, whose pathogens are *Salmonella typhi* and *Salmonella paratyphi* A and B.
  - ◆ Dysentery, whose pathogen is *Shigella* spp.
  - ◆ Cholera, whose agent is *Vibrio cholerae*.
  - ◆ Acute and diarrheal gastroenteritis, whose agents are enterotoxic *Escherichia coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Yersinia enterocolitica*, *Salmonella* spp. and *Shigella* spp.
  
- Main water-borne diseases caused by virus
  - ◆ Hepatitis A and B, whose agent is hepatitis A and B virus.
  - ◆ Poliomyelitis, whose agent is the poliomyelitis virus.
  - ◆ Acute and diarrheal gastroenteritis originated by the Norwalk virus, rotavirus, enterovirus, adenovirus, etc.
  
- Main water-borne diseases caused by parasites
  - ◆ Amebic dysentery, whose agent is *Entamoeba histolytica*.
  - ◆ Gastroenteritis, whose agents are *Giardia lamblia* and *Cryptosporidium*.

Source: *Guía de trabajo sobre el agua*. WHO/PAHO, AIDIS, CWWA. Lima: CEPIS; 2000, pp. 8-9.

## **2. The Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week: a brief history**

In 1992, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Inter-American Association of Sanitary Engineering (AIDIS), and the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA) signed the Declaration of the XIII Inter-American Congress of AIDIS in Havana (Cuba) and created the Inter-American Water Day.

The signatories of the Declaration agreed that although Latin America and the Caribbean are much richer regions in water resources than other parts of the world, water is not distributed uniformly. Furthermore, they pointed out that despite water is a natural resource essential for life, it has not been managed nor protected adequately.

In many parts of the continent and of the Caribbean countries, access to drinking water and regular sanitation services is still a problem, mainly in poor areas. In other places with supply services, water quality is not appropriate nor provided in adequate quantities to meet the vital needs of the population.

When creating the Inter-American Water Day, PAHO, AIDIS, and CWWA had the objective of raising awareness among the population of the Americas on the importance of this resource for life preservation. This event was known as “the water celebration in the Americas”, to advocate the following:

- a) improvement of treated water supply in poor regions of Latin America and the Caribbean
- b) increase in health investment, mainly to protect children as they are the most vulnerable segment of the population.

The entities that created the Inter-American Water Day also emphasized that, according to several studies, many diseases can be attributed to ingestion of polluted water and that problems caused by lack of environmental sanitation in the Region constitute the main cause of hospital admissions and deaths among children under 5 years old.

They also concluded that, at the beginning of the new millennium, the need for ensuring sustainable supply of treated water for all the Region is evident.

The signatories of the Declaration of Cuba, which gathered thousands of experts in sanitary and environmental engineering, suggested to set a common date for all countries to carry out activities regarding water preservation, since Latin America is facing increasing degradation of water resources. This trend –they alerted– endangers the sustainability of water supply in the continent.

This proposal was justified based on the need to mobilize water users, especially those who consume large quantities since they are more interested in its availability, paradoxically, they are also the ones who contribute more to its degradation. Consequently, it was established that the main characteristic of the Inter-American Water Day should be the willingness to join several segments of the society, from farmers to industry up to household users.

The key objective of the Inter-American Water Day is to demonstrate the close relation between water and health, as well as to raise awareness among people on the need to use water rationally, mainly through educational activities.

Other objectives were the struggle against water pollution to prevent water-borne diseases (especially, cholera); to promote participation of the government, international agencies, NGOs, private enterprises, and the community in the celebration of the Inter-

American Water Day; to further awareness not only among the public in general but especially among national authorities; and to show the urgency to solve water supply problems in urban and rural areas.

From the beginning of the Inter-American Water Day celebration, Latin American communities have reacted positively. Although there are still financial constraints, lack of governmental support, and insufficient time to organize activities, most countries are gaining more adhesions every year. In 1993, activities were carried out in 19 countries.

In 1994, Costa Rica –that was still recovering from the effects of a hurricane– held a smaller-scale event and another event on a date different from that established for the entire Region. In 1995, 25 countries included the Inter-American Water Day in its commemoration calendar and began to prepare this day six months in advance.

Starting in 1994, media participation in community mobilization became more active. In countries such as Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Suriname, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Chile, Haiti, El Salvador, and Brazil, activities are always widely disseminated through newspapers, radio, and television. Special events are prepared, such as round tables, and interviews and live conferences are transmitted.

In 1995, a book of stories prepared by children who participated in the school program “*Conservación del agua y educación sanitaria*” (*Water conservation and sanitary education*) was published in Peru. In Brazil, schools of Uruguaiana (Rio Grande do Sul) promoted a research to evaluate water use at the household level. The results were compiled in a publication sponsored by the local sanitation company.

Every year, the Water Day congregate a large number of institutions from all the continent. In 1994, the First Inter-American Water Week was held in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil. The idea was then adopted by other countries and in 1999 the Water Month was established in Ecuador.

Furthermore, governments have recognized the importance of the celebration. Honduras, Colombia, Paraguay, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and some Brazilian cities have already institutionalized the Inter-American Water Day.

There are still many pending tasks. The experiences of the first years of celebration have derived in recommendations provided by different countries of the Region. Some of the following advises continue to be valid:

- a) to expand local programs;
- b) to encourage more governmental and NGOs participation;
- c) to mobilize the business sector;
- d) to promote events for rural communities;
- e) to devote more time for planning;
- f) to expand information dissemination;
- g) to use videos as teaching tools;
- h) to increase participation of differentiated segments;
- i) to establish coordinating commissions among different institutions.

## CHART 1 FOR THIS SECTION

### **Nine water themes**

Every year a theme is selected as the guiding principle of the activities and celebrations of the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week throughout the Region. The following have been the nine themes selected since the first celebration in 1993.

- 2000.** Water, each drop counts: Let's use it wisely.
- 1999.** The right of all children to drinking water. Let's assume the commitment!
- 1998.** Let's participate to have clean water for all.
- 1997.** Safe water: source of life.
- 1996.** Water, valuable as life. Let's preserve it!
- 1995.** Water, a heritage to be preserved.
- 1994.** Water and your environment.
- 1993.** Water is life and health.

## CHART 2 FOR THIS SECTION

### *Institutional support*

The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization is a technical cooperation agency of the United Nations system. One of its missions is to carry out actions to reduce sanitary problems worldwide. Thus, it favors not only technical information exchange in the medical area but also promotes preventive measures. In that context, environmental health and basic sanitation interventions gain special importance.

The Inter-American Association for Sanitary Engineering (AIDIS), a technical-scientific agency that congregates environment and sanitation professionals of Latin America, and the equivalent agency for the countries of the Caribbean –the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA)– have improved sanitary and environmental conditions in the continent. That improvement has been their main challenge during the last 50 years.

The three institutions were signatories of the Declaration of the XIII Inter-American Congress of AIDIS in Havana (Cuba), which created the Inter-American Water Day. To mobilize populations in favor of water defense, various specialists are working annually in the production of support material to expand this proposal, such as the Pan American Center for Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences (CEPIS), located in Lima, Peru. Moreover, Representative Offices of the three institutions in Latin American countries, as well as PAHO/WHO headquarters in Washington D.C., are promoting and disseminating this proposal among an ever increasing number of people and organizations.

### **3. The organization of the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week: a proposal**

In Brazil, the state of Rio Grande do Sul was the pioneer in promoting integrated activities to call attention on the need of preserving water resources. The first activity was the Inter-American Water Week, which started in 1994 and was promoted by the Gaucha<sup>1</sup> section of the Associação Brasileira de Engenharia Sanitária e Ambiental (ABES-RS) and the Secretaria de Obras Públicas, Saneamento e Habitação of Rio Grande do Sul, with the participation of several public and private entities, and NGOs.

The purpose of the Water Week is to alert the population and governments on the importance of water as a finite resource that must be preserved. To raise awareness, the starting point is to disseminate information on water resources, its use, and problems due to misuse. Pollution and waste of such a valuable resource increase the cost of its preservation and management. Furthermore, when the hydrological cycle is compromised at any of its stages, hydrological basin behavior is also modified.

The main objective of the Water Week, besides setting the date in the official schedule of environmental events, was to raise awareness among users, mainly children, on the need for preserving water.

In addition, it is necessary to involve sectors that use and pollute water, such as agriculture, industry and power plants. Environmentalists, specially sanitation and

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<sup>1</sup> Native from Rio Grande do Sul.

environmental organizations, are concerned about the situation of water resources. However, this same concern is not present in other sectors.

In *Educación ambiental. Principios e prácticas* (1992), Genebaldo Freire Dias states that an educational process has two important moments: awareness –in this case, of environmental problems, relationship between different natural phenomena and the consequences of resource waste– and actions to minimize or prevent these consequences. Environmental education not only seeks knowledge acquisition but mainly behavior change. Within this framework, the proposal of the Water Week is to disseminate information and raise awareness on water, as well as to encourage the adoption of preventive practices through behavior change regarding rational water use, selective waste collection, etc.

Based on this proposal, in 1994 the state of Rio Grande do Sul decided to hold every year a series of events entitled the *Inter-American Water Week* and within it, the Inter-American Water Day was instituted on the first Saturday of October.

The Inter-American Water Week was created to join efforts among associations and different users. This idea has two purposes:

- 1) To settle peace in the struggle for water, since Brazil experiences a historical dispute among users, mainly in the area of energy generation and public supply. Rivalry has always existed among state services (sanitation companies) and municipalities (water and sewerage departments).
- 2) To consolidate the association with the State Electric Company (in Rio Grande do Sul most power comes from hydroelectric dams) and to strengthen the association with agriculture, a relevant economic activity in the State, in order to broaden the scope of activities and reach different types of public.

Media have received maximum attention in Rio Grande do Sul since a large information demand exists on water, especially on shortage, quality, and uses of water resources.

To promote community mobilization for water, all activities developed must focus on the subject to motivate different sectors of the society. The main objectives proposed are detailed below.

*In the electric power area.* It is necessary to disseminate the importance of water for energy generation companies and call attention on the impact of solid waste disposal into rivers on operational costs. The state of Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil in general have high consumption of hydroelectric power; therefore, it is understandable the willingness of the Electric Power Company to participate in the Water Week and its interest in water resources.

Among the activities proposed for this sector are: to place banners allusive to the day in company buildings of the entire state; to use advertising spaces in radio, newspapers, and television to disseminate messages on the week; to promote sector participation in public expositions on water uses; to send messages in electricity bills.

*In the sanitation area.* In this sector, the participation is more effective since water supply companies and municipal services cover major cities. In addition, basin committees and the Water Resource Council are committed.

Among the activities proposed for this sector are: to put banners in places where water supply companies and municipal services act; to send allusive phrases in water bills as well as by mail; to prepare brochures on source preservation; to organize conferences on water, its

use, and preservation, mainly at schools; to prepare and distribute advertising material on the week to be published by the press; to carry out an exposition in a shopping center with panels and show illustrative videos on water treatment; to distribute brochures; to foster debates on water resources and the pertinent legislation; to prepare articles for newspapers and interviews in radio and TV; to organize visits to water treatment plants, mainly for students; to distribute posters to the main sanitation companies.

*Nautical sports.* Rio Grande do Sul is known for nautical sports, mainly sailing. Nautical clubs have started to raise awareness among children on water resources protection. The activities proposed for this sector are: to participate in events held in lake and river borders; to sail boats with schoolchildren and the community; to organize public demonstrations in ships.

*Public transportation companies.* To improve the dissemination of the Water Week, allusive posters should be placed in all buses of the capital (more than 1,500).

*Soccer clubs.* Soccer stadiums are excellent places to disseminate this type of messages because they congregate large audiences. In 1995, during the edition of the Water Week, soccer clubs disseminated in stadiums the following text in banners: *Water is fundamental for life. Help preserve our rivers. Inter-American Water Week.*

*Banks.* State banking has been used to transmit messages in ATMs.

*Schools.* Through the environmental education area of the Secretariat of Education, several school activities were organized during the Water Week. Participating entities should provide materials for schools and promote the presence of technicians in school panels, as well as student visits to treatment plants.

*Media.* Gaining space in radio and television, as well as in newspapers during the Water Week should be a goal. Moreover, space paid by sponsors willing to address the subject should be sought. In 1994, space was obtained with the support of the Cooperativa de Médicos (Unimed) and information on the relation between basic sanitation and public health was transmitted.

An important factor for the expansion of the Water Week in Rio Grande do Sul has been the attention given to the press during the coordination of the event. From the first editions, the preparation of special material for the media was a concern.

It is necessary to train sanitation and environmental technicians so they can transmit their knowledge to the population through the press.

*Shopping centers.* Every year, shopping centers of Porto Alegre grant a privileged place for expositions on water uses. In those expositions, illustrative panels on water use and treatment for supply, irrigation, electric power, industry, etc, are placed, as well, people can watch videos on water treatment and preservation. On these occasions, brochures related to the campaign are distributed.

*Municipalities.* Since the First Inter-American Water Week, many municipalities have participated actively in action programming; many of them have even instituted their Municipal Water Day.

The celebration of the Week between 1994 and 1999 has demonstrated that the idea has been well accepted. The expansion of the participation to a large number of cities of the

state of Rio Grande do Sul and other states of the federation –such as Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Paraná, and Catarina Santa– shows the feasibility of the proposal. The fact of promoting several independent events with a common subject favors mobilization, since appeals are varied and constant. What is important is that former antagonistic segments –such as NGOs and local governments, environmentalists and industrials– today join efforts to promote the week.

Every year, the media of Rio Grande do Sul makes the event coverage more complex, creating special editions and *dossiers*. Because of this, information on water for journalists and for all those interested in the Week is enhanced in every edition with more varied contributions and constitutes an excellent resource to expand the knowledge of the community on water resources.

As a mobilization proposal, the idea of the Inter-American Water Week is opened to the participation of all interested in sharing, expanding, enhancing, and disseminating this experience.

A positive lesson in the organization of the Water Week has been the importance of establishing partnerships with different sectors to consolidate the idea. In many cities, the movement has already become independent and structured according to local perspectives. For example, the city of Guaíba, where a large cellulose company is located –whose predecessor was closed because it polluted water with its wastes– is today an important member of the event. In this city there is a coordinating group working with schools and other sectors of the community to select the theme that will be used. They prepare promotional material, collect resources, and promote activities.

As the event becomes part of the community, it is attracting the attention of other sectors –such as the political class– that can contribute to its expansion and consolidation. In this regard, the importance of partnerships with parliamentarians should be emphasized, since they can authorize proposals and donate resources to promote the Week.

**CHART 1 FOR THIS SECTION**  
**Eight examples of successful events**

- *Community work in Río dos Sinos.* This event was the result of an oil spill in one of the Petrobrás refineries, in the city of Canoas. When containment buoys were removed, experts noticed large quantities of wastes that were collected and exposed in river borders so the community could realize what they were throwing into the river.

In the following years, the idea was expanded and the community received training on environmental disasters. Furthermore, teachers were trained and students developed community activities. Currently, tens of professionals, hundreds of students, and the entire basin population participate in community works annually; every year, a different city is chosen. The idea to form a foundation to support this initiative is under study.

- *Water swing.* In the folklore of Rio Grande do Sul, the word *sarandeio* (swing) is used to designate the undulant movement of dancers with their skirts. Due to its similarity with the movement of river waves, this designation was also given to an event held in the city of Uruguaiana, in the border with Argentina. The name arose when the Sanitation Unit of the State Company became partner with the Delegation of Education. Throughout the year, schools develop activities related to the regional topic and during the Water Week they make a party in the park of the water treatment plant. Students using mock-ups, plays and music explain water treatment processes and ways to save this resource. In several occasions, schools of the city Paso de los Libres in Argentina have participated.

- *Water Parliament.* In this experience, the Legislative State Assembly organized a conference with international experts supported by the International Hydrologic Program of Unesco. The Legislative Assembly published the debates of the conference and distributed them in schools and universities. Currently, they are studying the possibility of preparing this activity again focusing debates on water legislation with participation of congressmen.

- *Forum Environmental Quality in Industry.* The purpose of this association with the Industrial Federation of Rio Grande do Sul is to meet business demands of information on water uses in industrial processes; i.e. everything related to legislation, regulation, and water fees. The forum has the support of the National Center of Clean Technologies.

- *Expo-water.* The purpose of this activity is to achieve the participation of main water users to entertain and inform the community through a fair with modules. Music, theater, lectures, videos, and other activities are programmed to call public attention. Expo-water receives many student visits.

- *Symphonic concert.* This representation had great public impact. The Symphonic Orchestra of Porto Alegre, the Sanitation Company, and other entities collaborated in an open air presentation at the pier. The program was as follows: *River Moldau*, by B. Smetana; *Suite Grand Canyon*, by F. Grofé; *Singing in the Rain*, by N. Herb Brown; *Pastoral Symphony. Storm*, by L. van Beethoven; *Water music*, by G. F. Händel; *William Tell.*, by F. Händel; *Thunder and Lightning and The Blue Danube*, by J. Strauss.

• *Water Wheel Project.* This project was developed in the city of Santa Cruz by the Sanitation Company and other associations as part of the environmental license granted to build a dam that required the planting of 120 thousand trees. To achieve the objective, clubs were created in most schools of the city to carry out preservation activities, including planting and “adoption” of trees by student groups. Since smoke and fumes are a concern in the city, another purpose of the project was to raise awareness among farmers to preserve river borders from this problem.

• *Lectures to public school teachers.* A very positive experience in Rio Grande do Sul was the series of lectures given by public teachers, through education delegations. To take advantage of the monthly meetings with school directors of the regions, lectures on the Water Week, videos, and reports on water problems worldwide were presented. Materials available to be distributed in schools were shown and different possibilities of working with children and the entire school community were discussed. Local representatives of the sanitation company also participated in those meetings and were gradually identified as information sources on water resource in the Region. Results were very encouraging and cooperation links were established between schools and the sanitation company.

### 3.1. Stages proposed

#### 1. *Creating a coordinating group*

The first step to organize the Water Week, either in a country, state, municipality or institution, is to create a coordinating group in charge of taking all provisions necessary to achieve a sustainable proposal.

This coordinating group will be formed at least by a representative of each entity or sector that initially showed interest in participating in the mobilization. Rio Grande do Sul decided to carry out, starting in January, a monthly meeting for a joint debate and to prepare a proposal with all participating entities. As the date gets closer, meetings can become weekly to deal with specific issues. Contact among different institutions should be permanent task.

One of the entities participating in the coordinating group should assume administrative functions such as:

- Convoke participants to monthly meetings, either via fax or e-mail. Participation should be confirmed by telephone.
- Prepare the venue where the meeting will be held (room and equipment, if necessary).
- Follow participant recommendations, such as evaluating directly the venues where each event will be held, contacting people and entities, etc.
- Prepare, together with other coordinating group members, the Week budget to suggest financing sources and assume responsibility for its execution.
- Advise on project preparation and promotional material to seek financing sources.
- Participate in preparatory meetings of important events when partners require the support of the coordinating group.
- Prepare the preliminary programming of the week and supervise the final timetable to avoid any overlapping.

According to the number of activities, the coordinating group should propose specific working groups to decentralize the initiative. Some working groups can be: finances and resource collection, communication and material production, and event preparation.

#### **Warning!**

The creation of many working groups can neutralize the activities of the coordinating group and may negatively affect its task.

Another important task of the coordinating group is to seek institutional and financial support of new partners to expand the coverage. The list of participating entities must include representatives of the energy (hydroelectric), fishing, agriculture, nautical sports, and tourism sectors, since they are some of the main water users.

The coordinating group should include a spokesman with good communication skills to deal with the press and inform on activities, preparations, topics to be discussed, and programming.

**Attention!**

Ideally, the members of the coordinating group should be familiar with water resource problems, both locally and worldwide. Journalists must not be limited to local issues.

The coordinating group is the “soul” of the Week; it should continuously propose ideas and meetings with different sectors to achieve new commitments. But this “soul” cannot establish anything unless it has committed and effective members. The following were some key partners of the Rio Grande do Sul experience.

*NGOs.* These activist organizations have influence on specific audiences and its participation in the Water Week activities expands and consolidates the proposal. Although they support specific interests, NGOs contribute with message dissemination. An example is the presence of the NGO “Sea Sheperd Brasil” in some editions of the Water Week in Rio Grande do Sul focused on ocean defense. Another NGO related to biodiversity may consider water resource conservation as an essential condition to preserve ecosystems.

*Public agencies.* The participation of public agencies –mainly those related to sanitation, environment, and water resource topics– is fundamental to organize the initial structure of the movement. In the coordinating committee, the presence of municipal, state, and federal (departmental or provincial) representatives of the sanitation, environment, water resource, education and sport, tourism, culture, planning, and development areas should be ensured. Basin management committees can also have great influence in the dissemination of proposals. In addition, it is important to obtain the adhesion of urban cleaning and sewerage utilities.

An entity that is expanding its participation in environmental issues is the Public Ministry, both at the federal and state levels, which means that it should be included in the organization of the Week. In Rio Grande do Sul, this entity has always had a significant role in the dissemination and explanation of environmental legislation, as well as in the advocacy of citizen’s rights in environmental issues.

Another successful experience was the participation of congressmen, from the Chamber of Counselors, Legislative Assemblies, and the National Congress. During four consecutive years, an event called the Water Parliament was held with the support of the Environment Commission of the Legislative Assembly. This promoted a debate on water resources that reached the Parliament, which helped clarify the topic to congressmen. Many members of municipal councils have participated in events related to the Water Week; in some of them, municipal edicts were proposed to celebrate the Municipal Water Day on the first Saturday of October, recording the event in the official schedule of the city.

It is necessary to control the participation of public and private institutions in the Water Week to avoid the defense of specific interests.

*School network.* In several publications produced since the first edition of the Inter-American Water Day, PAHO/WHO has emphasized the importance of schools in raising awareness to preserve natural resources. The school plays a key role to promote and mobilize parents, teachers, students and institutions. The teacher helps to form habits and attitudes to use the resource rationally and participates actively in all sanitation actions of the school. Schools should have an active and permanent participation in the mobilization proposal during the Water Week.

With regard to the Week, school participation begins with the identification of main environmental problems, as well as their causes and impact on life quality and health of the population; this participation is consolidated through actions aimed at raising awareness to preserve the environment. In the classroom, students can identify main water users, conflicts generated by growing competition regarding water use, problems caused by pollution and irrational use of this resource, and the importance of the proper use and conservation of water resources.

Through permanent education a student can learn to rationally use water at home, not to waste nor contaminate it, and to promote its efficient use in agriculture and power generation. The student must become aware that water is a finite resource that should be used adequately and replaced in equal conditions.

Schools should also explain that almost all health problems in Latin American countries are related to infectious and parasitic diseases due to poor drinking water quality and supply. Students should be aware that bad sanitation and inadequate hygiene of communities and schools may worsen disease transmission.

Therefore, schools should help detect major health problems caused by lack of water and hygiene. Teachers should raise awareness on the need for having adequate sanitation services and appropriate quantity of water at schools and communities to guarantee health and life quality.

*Other stakeholders.* Since agriculture and industry use large amounts of water, it is very important to mobilize these sectors for the Week activities. A first step in agriculture is to act through public agencies that operate in rural areas. Technicians in direct contact with farmers should orient them not only on crop methods but also on basic sanitation and water use.

A successful activity carried out with the agricultural sector was to disseminate information on drinking water disinfection. Well water analysis was promoted and the importance of continuous monitoring was emphasized. Furthermore, lectures on river bank preservation and the need to plant trees were organized.

Working with basin committees is other important partnership, since in some countries –such as Brazil– water use for irrigation will be charged. In some regions with conflicts between the irrigation and domestic supply sectors, farmers are very concerned about the rational use of water.

The industrial sector is also enhancing its participation in the Water Week. The experience with the Forum Environmental Quality in Industry, described under “Eight examples of successful events”, had excellent results.

Global movements aimed at improving environmental quality in industry should be used as examples to motivate water concern in the industrial sector. Due to environmentalist pressure, the United States president, Bill Clinton, adopted new rules to prohibit North American agencies to support large companies and projects in national parks or protected areas and rain forests. Environmental rules also require follow-up and information on gas emissions in energy generation projects.

For some industrial sectors, water is such a strategic input that the perspective to pay for water extracted directly from rivers or subsoil, reflected in the final cost of the product, is generating alternatives oriented not only to save water through reuse and measures against waste, but also to search other solutions including desalination. The number of companies using clean technologies to reduce water consumption is increasing. Pollution has become a synonym of waste and inefficiency.

It is also fundamental to work with universities since they concentrate extensive scientific knowledge and are valuable sources of information. In addition, awareness should be raised among future professionals regarding water preservation.

Several universities have been partners of the Water Week and in 1999 they participated in the debate of an innovative proposal: professors of the Universidad del Valle del Río dos Sinos began to analyze the idea of giving lectures on water topics in all educational centers during October. In this way, the concern regarding water resources will be present in human sciences, arts, biology, laws, economy, engineering, etc.

### *2. Looking for resources*

To hold an event of such magnitude as the Water Week, a minimum budget should be estimated to cover expenses and remunerate adequately all professional services. This is not a very difficult task. Resources are always available for good projects. It is important that sponsors feel they are participating in a sound proposal that can be implemented in their own institutions as well.

There are several ways to obtain resources for the Water Week; the more professional the proposal preparation, the greater the probabilities to obtain adhesion of organizations with significant presence in the community. As the event grows and is disseminated in the media, it is easier to obtain sponsorship. In the fifth edition of the Water Week in Rio Grande do Sul, the coordinating group developed several proposals for resource collection, from the edition of a book on water history –as a gift for clients of the participating company– up to the preparation of brochures on recycling.

At this point, the limit is the creativity of each team. There are many options to disseminate basic messages, from a simple T-shirt with the week theme –that can even allow financial recovery– up to complete “packages” of sponsorship or exchange. Air transportation companies can offer free tickets for lecturers, while hotels can offer discounts to guests participating in community events. Many companies can also disseminate messages on the Week in their advertising or assume responsibility for transporting the material to fairs and presentations. It is always possible to find an adequate form of participation.

An interesting example was the Symphonic Orchestra concert in the Porto Alegre pier during the Third Inter-American Water Week in 1996, with a repertory of musical pieces that had water as the core topic. Members of the orchestra donated their salaries that night, an advertising agency offered the brochure with the concert program, the state sanitation company installed the stage, paid the equipment rent, and provided transportation to musicians. Even the sky collaborated, since the concert was in the open air and the weather was nice.

### *3. Planning activities*

Once the coordinating group is established, the main task is to plan the events that will be part of the Week schedule. These events should allow the community to understand the effect of water in daily life.

Among the objectives are:

- To explain people their right to high quality water. It should be mentioned that this right can only be achieved through actions that guarantee water conservation, both in quality and quantity, for human and all living ecosystems.

- To make water protection a common responsibility.
- To start working for a better future of water resources since water crisis can be aggravated.
- To emphasize the role of women and young people in water management.
- To raise awareness on the importance of this valuable and limited resource, as well as the close relation between soil and water.
- To raise awareness among political leaders (mayors, representatives, senators) on the need for a change in water resource management and protection.

The events for the Water Week can be grouped as follows:

*Technical events:* seminars, lectures, symposia, visits, etc.

*Political-institutional events:* inaugurations, work exhibitions, bids, etc.

*Ludic events:* musical and theater presentations, games, sailing trips, sport competitions, etc.

*Manifestations:* embrace the river (human cord in river borders), community cleaning works, public manifestations on foot, ships, etc.

*Educational events:* school fairs, expositions, visits to treatment plants, drawing and design competitions.

*Journalistic events:* course on water resources for journalists, round tables, press conferences, interviews.

*Mixed events:* combination of two or more different events.

The Rio Grande do Sul experience may be used as a programming model. Many activities can be programmed in various cities; decentralization at the state, region, department, and district levels should be encouraged. Thus, promotion is not focused on a few people, but shared among participating organizations.

An important task of the coordinating group is to prepare the program during monthly meetings; different suggestions should be discussed to exchange ideas and promote cooperation among participants. Usually one entity wants to carry out one conference and another has available lecturers. The application of this strategy allowed in one Week edition more than 1,000 events in Rio Grande do Sul.

It is necessary to ensure the availability of promoters for most of the events. These activities can be public demonstrations, interactive expositions, community works, etc. This is the opportunity to gather different sectors. The expert Bernardo Toro explains that it is important for the people to know that there are other persons from different fields doing the same work with the same objective. When fans go to a soccer stadium, they have the same goal: victory. In that moment, they have common ideas that encourage them to work together to reach that same objective. This is one of the reasons why every year a common topic is suggested for the Water Week. Approaches can be different in each country, city, or state, but the theme should always be the same.

Each type of event implies a series of preparation stages. For example, the placement of banners in streets –a very efficient dissemination resource– requires:

- To prepare a common scheme that will be adopted by all organizations.
- To request authorization from the municipality specifying the sites where banners can be placed.
- To send the banners to those in charge of placing them.
- To place banners in authorized sites.
- To remove banners at the end of the Week.

The larger the event, the more measures should be taken. It should be emphasized that the participation of an heterogeneous audience in public areas requires waste containers and cleaning of the sites after the event. Wastes cannot be accumulated nor thrown away.

## BOX 2 FOR THIS SECTION

*An example of public activity: exposition of posters*

**Suggestion: obtain reproduction of posters mentioned in the text)**

An efficient way of attracting public attention is to promote the exposition of posters in shopping centers and fairs. An exposition that had great success was a group of posters made by an advertising firm that conceived water as a commercial product. The posters included the following phrases:

- *Earth is the only planet where water has four states: solid, liquid, gaseous, and contaminated.* The background had a photo of the Earth seen from the space.
- *Nothing that has been, will ever be again (Nada do que foi será de novo do jeito que já já foi um dia,* phrase from a very successful song in Brazil). The back had the photo of a forest in flames with the following text below: *Forests help regulate water cycle, wind speed, and air quality. Forests are endangered!*
- *Do not drink with strangers.* The phrase accompanied the image of a microorganism in black background with the following text: *Untreated water contains microorganisms that can cause diseases.*

For the exposition of posters (maximum number: 60) allusive to the Inter-American Water Week in a shopping center, the following actions should be considered by several institutions:

*With regard to the exposition itself:*

- Specify the number of posters per institution.
- Select the adequate date for the mounting.
- Coordinate a meeting with the speakers.
- Have a public counter for information in place.
- Specify who will participate in the sample mounting.
- Think about a parallel program to attract public attention: music, videotapes, printed material, etc.
- Provide transportation and feeding to the people who will attend.
- Promote the event in the press before and during the event. A person should always be present in the exposition to deal with journalists.
- Program the formal opening of the exposition.

*Concerning the material to be prepared:*

- Estimate a budget, establish the total number of posters, discuss the subject that will be addressed, and prepare the material.
- Supervise the mounting.
- Supervise the exposition maintenance.
- Plan the dismounting.

**(END OF BOX)**

#### 4. *Exploring the theme of the week in the local area*

From the beginning of the advocacy in favor of the environment, the phrase *Think globally; act locally* was made famous. According to environmentalists, general concerns should be observed in citizens daily life. This approach will make it possible to act locally and mobilize the population based on their daily life and community scope, where governments are usually absent.

The experience has confirmed that people usually wonder how they could preserve water at their own home, work, or school. Consequently, success and adhesion to water advocacy should begin by showing what can be done in the same community.

A strategy that had great success was the regionalization of events programmed by the Companhia Estadual de Saneamento de Rio Grande do Sul. In each regional office of the company –that operates in many municipalities– a working group was in charge of contacting other entities to coordinate the events in accordance with the regional situation. The work of these local nuclei strengthened the movement. On the other hand, this mobilization was very useful since during three consecutive years there were water supply problems due to prolonged droughts, which made population aware of the advantages of rational consumption to avoid more extended shortenings. The community became aware of major problems –such as low water flow due to lack of rain– and it collaborated actively to control water and avoid its waste.

In some regions, in addition to the dissemination of material provided by the state coordination, working groups prepared information on regional water resources to disseminate it among local newspapers. In one of the cities, the local newspaper headed a campaign for cleaning and preserving the neighboring beach resort. The movement expanded its scope of actions through waste collection and disposal improvement, tree planting in the borders, reporting of clandestine waste disposal, and illegal sand removal. The community also put pressure on the sanitation company to treat wastewater before discharging it in the river. Various press reports were made on basin problems. Due to newspaper coverage, the campaign reached municipalities close to those where activities were implemented.

Rural areas, where water resource supply is often precarious, both in terms of quantity and quality, should take advantage of the Water Week to explain the need for monitoring wells and water sources, carry out water quality analysis with the support of health surveillance agencies, and disseminate the results.

#### 5. *Preparing informative material*

From the first edition of the Inter-American Water Day, promoting entities supported the movement with informative material containing different approaches, which made it possible to expand water resource perspectives in each version.

This aspect, complemented with good planning and partnerships, has provided adequate foundations to make communities value water resources.

The specialists Bernardo Toro and Nísia Maria Werneck state that during a mobilization, people continually need to have “clear information on objectives, goals, current situation, and priorities of the mobilization so that they be willing to participate and discover how can they contribute.”

The material designed to disseminate the mobilization among the community in general is as important as the one oriented to the participating organizations. The posters and Week schedule are the main materials. As more entities and hundreds of people congregate around a relevant topic such as water, more organizations and people would like to participate and know the proposal.

In former editions, informative material was produced in accordance with different types of recipients. For some specific events, such as forums directed to the industrial area, special brochures and posters were prepared. A sanitation association published hundreds of posters with the phrase *Since you are 70% water, you are 100% responsible for it. Don't contaminate it, don't waste it!* The campaign also included radio messages and newspaper announcements.

Another type of informative material are banderoles placed in streets, pamphlets on different subjects related to water and sanitation, stickers, and pins for public events such as seminars, conferences, and ceremonies. In joint exposures, each entity may distribute specific material related to its own work.

To prepare bulletins or murals, the following scheme should be followed for material selection:

*Institutional material.* General information on the project, statistics, progress, comparative tables, and national and international data on the subject.

*Motivation.* Articles, citations, interviews with leaders (avoid flattering).

*Orientation.* Informative data on hygiene, health, disease prevention, rational water consumption, and leak control.

*Education.* General knowledge: history, geography, environmental education, specially with local and regional data.

*Information on integration activities.* Sports, celebrations.

*Recreation.* Games, slides, tales, curiosities.

*Report.* Focus at least on one subject with greater depth.

According to some studies, behavioral change is easier when ideals are in harmony with the standards and feelings of loyalty of the group. Wilbur Schramm, a communication theorist, states that various experiences have demonstrated the importance of group relations to change individual attitudes. As an example, he cites regimens such as nazism or communism that achieved broad adhesions due to the support of group organizations and intensive use of media.

Another advice of communication theorists is to repeat the messages with variations. Repetition allows better learning, provided the messages are not monotonous. However, it should be considered that after a given time, people get saturated and it is necessary to abandon the initial message.

Other strategy that promotes change of attitude is to encourage participation. When the participant feels motivated to express the desired attitude through a letter, as member of a club, or in a public demonstration, it is easier for him to persevere. Greater effect could be achieved if the media are used to transmit a message and if it is strengthened with individual contacts rather than using only one of these means.

In short, the use of the media as a strategy to change community behavior is more effective when the following conditions are given:

1. Messages are directed towards individual needs and desires.

2. Society support is provided to achieve the attitudes expected.
3. Messages can be strengthened with parallel and related events.
4. A channel is available to act in the direction of the desired attitude.

### BOX 3 FOR THIS SECTION

#### Information travels through different roads

*Use all communication means other than press media to disseminate the objectives of the event*

- *In the open air.* Think about panels placed in roads, posters in streets, banderoles, murals, or advertisements painted in buses. In communities that do not have formal communications media –such as radio and television– loudspeakers in automobiles are widely used.
- *Direct correspondence.* Pamphlets, bulletins, or leaflets sent by mail or distributed in the streets.
- *Posters.* They can be printed or drawn. They are more efficient when the texts and illustrations reflect local values.
- *Live notifications* (spots). Texts read in public (using the microphone).
- *Jingles.* Small musical parts especially created to disseminate a product or service.
- *Products especially created to disseminate the promotion.* Caps (like those used by Formula 1 runners), soccer shirts, notes in stadiums. (*Suggestion:* it is possible that one or more products that sponsor the initiative be used in national soap operas).

(END OF BOX)

#### 6. Mobilizing the press

The organization of the Inter-American Water Day and the Inter-American Water Week in Rio Grande do Sul, has had the permanent contribution of the media. Thus, their requests have been addressed. Without a doubt, it is a two way-road. Consequently, one of the first measures that should be taken to initiate relations with the media is to organize people who will act as information sources and spokesmen of the movement. These people should be technicians willing to serve the press whenever necessary, even once the Water Week is over. Those specialists should consider that they should use simple language when dealing with the general public through the media. The abuse of technical terms would only lead to lack of communication.

Another essential task is to inform newspapers, radios, and TV channels on water-related events through brief notes. For journalists, guidelines and advice on water saving, tables on water-borne diseases, specific and curious data on how much water is consumed during a shower, etc. are useful. In Rio Grande do Sul, efforts have been devoted every year to prepare an information package (*dossier*) for the press.

Furthermore, the so-called *guideline suggestions* can be prepared for each activity, even about the Week organization. The arrival of foreign specialists can provide a broader vision of water resources and it is always good news for the press. On those occasions, the media should be invited to meet those persons. Another excellent news for the press are reports disseminated by PAHO on the situation and evolution of water-borne diseases, the state of sanitation infrastructure, deficiencies, etc.

It is important to have press advisory services during the Inter-American Water Week to achieve good coverage and the largest possible space in the media. Most sanitation companies and public agencies have good press offices and its professionals usually contact newspapers and journals, as well as producers of journalistic programs of the main radio and television stations. This support can be very useful to disseminate the Week events.

At the preparation meetings, a list should be made with all press contacts during the Week to facilitate specialists for interviews and interventions in panels and debates. Among those sources should be people with skills for writing articles on water-related topics in newspapers. This material is used optimally in regional newspapers.

*As a conclusion*

How actions described in the six previous stages could motivate a change of perception with regard to water resources and a collective commitment to protect them? An indispensable step in a mobilization strategy is what specialists call *collectivization*; i.e., a situation in which each member or participant is aware that what he does is also done by others for the same reasons and with the same meaning.

The participation of the society is important to develop new values that help individuals and public and private organizations to face social and environmental realities and changing development challenges. Society needs incentives to define priorities within the framework of a collective long-term plan. Only then we could be able to achieve a democratic status, which is the opposite of manipulation or the traditional state paternalism. When citizen commitment and action is obtained, the basis of power legitimacy is consolidated. However, it is necessary to establish priorities in environmental conservation actions and plan our activities with professionalism, time, and dedication.

**BOX 4 FOR THIS SECTION**

**An example of an informative note**

“Economic development through environmental preservation of hydrographic microbasins” is the subject of the lecture to be given by the agricultural expert Eng. Elcir Gausmann, from the Regional Office of the central plateau of Emater, in the EXPO-WATER, one of the events of the III Inter-American Water Week. The conference will start at 16:00 hours on 10 October 2000, in Warehouse B of the port pier and will address, among other topics, soil degradation, evaluation of the hydrographic network of the State, water resource potential for water supply and irrigation, and economic, social and environmental results of the State Hydrographic Microbasin Program.

Porto Alegre, October 2000

**For any coordination related to the event, please contact: Fatima de Oliveira-Lima, press responsible of the III Inter-American Water Week. Telephone: 497-8786. E-mail: semana3@prensa.org.br**

**(END OF BOX)**

**BOX 5 FOR THIS SECTION**

### **Flash! An example of brief note**

In Cuenca del Guaíba, approximately 2,400 liters of wastewater are discharged per second, increasing pollution. The purpose of Pro-Guaíba is to reduce the impact of this waste. **Healthy water, life source. IV Inter-American Water Week, 4 - 11 October. Come and participate!**

**END OF BOX**

## **BOX 6 FOR THIS SECTION**

### **To think. An example of a leading article**

Title: Healthy water, source of life

Cecy Hirano,  
*coordinator of the Water Week  
in Rio Grande do Sul*

According to data of the Pan American Health Organization, there are 4 billion cases of diarrhea worldwide. This means that 127 people become ill each second, mainly due to microorganisms present in untreated water. This filthy water is also responsible for the death of a child every 14 seconds.

These impressive figures are part of the daily life of many Brazilians. Even in Rio Grande do Sul –where sanitation indexes are excellent– there are communities, especially in the rural area, with water supply deficiencies. Despite having an extensive water network, it has areas under alert state due to increasing water source degradation. Only in the recovery of the Guaíba basin, 220 million dollars have been invested, half of which have been used for wastewater collection and treatment systems in the cities of Cachoeirinha, Gravataí, and Porto Alegre. Summer holidays in the old beaches of Guaíba, Dos Sinos, and Gravataí are only nostalgic memories from the seventies. Currently, children contact with rivers of the metropolitan region is through community works in places where tons of refuse collected are testimony that there is still a lot to be made.

Fortunately, concern is growing among communities to preserve water and cities are increasingly preparing activities for the IV Inter-American Water Week, that will be carried out from 4 to 11 October. In 1993, when the first Saturday of October was instituted as the Inter-American Water Day, the Pan American Health Organization, together with the Inter-American Association of Sanitary Engineering and the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association, wanted to emphasize all the population the need to participate in environmental preservation actions. In fact, if we consider that currently the leading causes of river degradation are the disposal of raw domestic wastewater and garbage, it is easy to conclude that this situation will change when the community understands exactly how poor environmental conditions can affect human health today and in the future.

A positive data is that, through the Inter-American Water Week, mobilization continues to grow every year, with significant participation of public and private schools, mayors, public agencies, children, young people, adults, and the elderly. The growing adhesion to this proposal seems to indicate that the lesson of the admirable Colombian educator Bernardo Toro has been learned. He states that the great challenge of science and technology is to transform what is natural wealth into usable resources for the purpose of preserving and generating wealth, not only money. “Learning to preserve the environment implies not confusing wealth with money”. “There is no point in earning money if we destroy our common wealth: water, oxygen, rain forest, and biodiversity.”

**END OF BOX**

### 3.2. Suggested activities

1. To create, through a legal disposition, the Municipal Water Day or Week to make activities official.
2. To organize selective waste collection campaigns; begin with public areas and municipal schools. To carry out recreational competitions to promote this collection. To produce educational material using money collected from the sale of wastes selected.
3. To further community works to clean specific sectors of the main water source in the city to demonstrate how much refuse is being discharged into the rivers. To promote a waste exposition to identify their origin.
4. To transmit videotapes related to water resources in places with great affluence of people (for example, shopping centers, cultural centers, etc.).
5. To promote, together with schools, a research to raise awareness among students with regard to municipal water resources and identify the headwaters and mouth of the river. To assess water quality in several reaches of the main river. To identify what economic activities are located throughout the course and which can be a pollution source. To contact companies to know what type of treatment they are applying to minimize or stop contamination.
6. To promote science fairs focused on water and its various uses.
7. To show how water treatment is carried out.
8. To give diplomas to *friends of water*, through clubs –such as the Lions Club and the Rotary Club– to reward people and entities that defend resource preservation. The diplomas can be given in a seminar where municipal problems are discussed.
9. To mobilize the population for an Embrace the River activity. To organize child patrols to preserve various river stretches.
10. To disseminate among farmers the need for preserving river banks.
11. To implement waste recycling programs in rural areas, specially the use of compost as natural fertilizer.
12. To develop a health campaign on water-borne diseases and disseminate preventive measures to avoid them.
13. To prepare a water mural in each classroom to be exposed during the Week.
14. To carry out a public exposition with modules on water use organized by public and private institutions that use this resource.
15. To promote symphonic concerts with a repertory of classical music inspired in water.
16. To foster the distribution of water brochures in public places (shopping centers, stadiums, fairs) and to carry out small parallel events to attract public.
17. To create competitions of mock-ups and posters that illustrate water-related subjects.
18. To perform musical events in public places close to rivers to disseminate messages on water preservation.
19. To promote a cycle of lectures on water at schools and companies.
20. To organize an exposition on the history of water and its future.
21. To promote the dissemination of music related to water in discotheques during the Week.
22. To organize forums with different companies to debate about the use of water in industries. To disseminate the names of those who save water during production processes.
23. To present plays focused on the environment.
24. To carry out photo expositions showing major regional water resources.

25. To organize a forum with the Sanitary Engineering Association to address major pollution problems and inadequate use of water sources. To guarantee the participation of different users and entities involved in contamination problems: urban and rural consumers, farmers, industrials, miners, private entities, professional schools, research centers, NGOs, local authorities, universities, ministries, environmental authorities, and basin administrators.
26. To summon the community, through the Ministry of Health and local NGOs, to attend discussion seminars on the following subjects:
  - water pollution.
  - effects of water pollution on human health, plants, and animals.
  - environmental health promotion.
  - preventive measures to improve health and the environment.
27. To organize seminars, through NGOs, with formal and informal water users to discuss major problems and identify solutions.
28. To coordinate, with the support of the Ministry of Education or state secretariats (regional, departmental, or provincial), the organization of activities for the Water Week, such as:
  - To prepare a school newspaper on the preservation of water and natural resources.
  - To promote research projects, in the history course, on technologies used for water management by ancient cultures of the region or country.
29. To promote seminars on basin management. To gather representatives from different user sectors.
30. To organize round tables with the participation of local authorities (mayors, aldermen, municipal advisers) to deal with the following subjects:
  - The role of local governments in environmental management.
  - How to promote citizen participation in local environmental management.
  - Mechanisms to resolve local environmental conflicts.
31. To convoke a round table to discuss national environmental regulations.
32. To organize lectures with professional schools and universities on the adoption of clean technologies. To summon the productive sectors, including farmers, industrials, formal and informal businessmen, and private and state companies.
33. To carry out community debates, through NGOs, on technology alternatives to solve problems related to water and environmental sanitation.
34. To organize with the municipalities, seminars on standards, competencies, and the role of the local government in environmental management. To publish and disseminate the ensuing reports.
35. To work with educational centers, through the Ministry of Education, in the preparation of posters with the subject "The right to clean environment". To publish the best works.
36. To promote boat trips with authorities and the press. To show the preservation or degradation conditions of water sources.
37. To promote, through the mail office of the country, the edition of a postal stamp to commemorate the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week.
38. To organize, with sports clubs, nautical competitions on the occasion of the Week.
39. To promote guided visits to water and wastewater treatment plants.
40. To distribute stickers, pins, and T-shirts.
41. To foster tree planting in river and lake banks.
42. To teach the population how to clean water tanks correctly and promote the execution of water quality analyses in rural areas.

43. To propose that all school classes carry out an assignment on how to save water. To promote the public presentation of those works.
44. In the natural sciences course, ask the students to do the following work: “What is ecology, what is an ecological system, and which are its components?” The works should include bibliographic references.
45. In the chemistry course, identify the main pollutants of water, air, and soil.
46. To request the students to identify main water sources and contamination problems in their community.
47. To request the regional delegations of the Ministry of Health to carry out a demonstration on how to disinfect water in schools.
48. In the classroom, ask the students to design water collection, treatment, and distribution processes.
49. To carry out a tree planting campaign in schools and the community. To request the Ministry of Agriculture to donate the seedlings.

### 3.3. Checklist to organize the activities of the event

The following list will help the coordinating groups to confirm if they have taken the most important steps to mobilize the population based on the objectives of the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week.

*To create the coordinating group*

Have the administrative tasks related to the organization been delegated to one of the entities participating in the coordinating group?

Yes

No

Have all NGOs devoted to environmental problems been summoned to participate in the proposal?

Yes

No

Have the participation of municipal, state, and federal (departmental or provincial) organizations be ensured in the coordinating committee, including representatives from the sanitation, environment, water resource, education and sport, tourism, culture, planning, and development areas?

Yes

No

Have they obtained the adhesion of representatives of urban cleaning and sewerage utilities?

Yes

No

Have they summoned other public utilities (electric supply, telephony) with important presence in the jurisdiction to participate in the initiative?

Yes

No

Have they obtained the Public Ministry representation in the organization committee of the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week to support the dissemination of environmental legislation?

Yes

No

Have they sought the contribution of schools in the identification of major environmental problems of the community, its causes, and impacts on life quality and health of the population?

Yes

No

Have they contact responsible people and technicians of the basin committees?

Yes

No

Have they contact the Water Resource Council or any equivalent entity?

Yes

No

Have they contact lawmakers to get the authorization of the proposal to facilitate financing of the Week activities?

Yes

No

Have they guaranteed that representatives of universities act as partners of the initiative?

Yes

No

Have they sought the adhesion of the major soccer clubs?

Yes

No

*To look for resources*

Have they prepared advertising material on the Inter-American Water Week and on the Inter-American Water Day?

Yes

No

Have they taken advantage of the advertising spaces of one of the financing companies to disseminate messages in radio, newspapers, and television?

Yes

No

*To plan the activities*

Have they programmed, with due anticipation, a series of regular meetings of the coordinating group to debate and develop the proposal?

Yes

No

Have working groups been formed, in accordance with the number of activities, to decentralize the organization?

Yes

No

Have they estimated a minimum budget to cover expenditures and professional services for different activities?

Yes

No

Have they planned selective refuse collection in the most important river or lake banks of the locality?

Yes

No

Have they created diplomas to reward annually the *friends of water* that participated in water preservation activities?

Yes

No

Have they developed a health campaign on water-borne diseases?

Yes

No

Have they planned a competition of mock-ups and posters related to water?

Yes

No

Have they organized seminars, with the support of the Ministry of Health and local NGOs on water pollution and its effects on health?

Yes

No

Have they planned, with the Ministry of Education and the state, departmental or provincial educational secretariats, activities at schools for the Water Week and the Inter-American Water Day?

Yes

No

Have they distributed materials allusive to the Water Week and the Inter-American Water Day at public and private schools?

Yes

No

Have they promoted research, together with schools, on municipal water resources identifying headwaters and mouths of rivers?

Yes

No

Have they organized seminars on basin management with the participation of different users?

Yes

No

Have they organized guided visits to water and wastewater treatment plants?

Yes

No

Have they organized public debates on water legislation?

Yes

No

Have they planned a water exposition with the participation of main water users, accompanied by musical entertainment, lectures, and videotapes?

Yes

No

*To explore the subject of the Week in the local area*

Have they promoted decentralization, in such a way that each city could reflect their own problems and needs?

Yes

No

Have they promoted activities to raise awareness among farmers on the need to preserve natural plant barriers in river and lake banks?

Yes

No

*To produce informative material*

Have they produced different types of informative material, according to various types of recipients?

Yes

No

Have they prepared special *dossiers* for the press with information on the Inter-American Water Day, the Water Week, and local conditions of water?

Yes

No

Have they guaranteed the permanent delivery of information to the media?

Yes

No

Have they prepared a set of leading articles for the press?

Yes

No

Have they prepared, during the Week, brief notes with orientations and advice on water saving, diseases related to water quality, and curious data?

Yes

No

Have they arranged interviews and reports with the radio and television on the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week?

Yes

No

Have they used the streets to place banderoles allusive to the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week?

Yes

No

Have they placed messages allusive to the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week in public transportation vehicles?

Yes

No

*To mobilize the press*

Have they elected a spokesman of the coordinating group with good communication skills to deal with the press?

Yes

No

Have they prepared a list of people who will act as information sources and official spokesmen of the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week?

Yes

No

Have they sent this list to the media with due anticipation?

Yes

No

Have they hired a press adviser?

Yes

No

## **4. Other successful experiences in the Region**

### *Trinidad and Tobago*

Barely 30% of the country has continuous water supply 24-hours a day, which entails the need to store this resource. Children are directly affected by water shortage, since often schools must be closed when reservoirs are dry. Hence, the celebration of the Inter-American Water Day has great importance. Among the activities that have been carried out and are worth mentioning are music and poster competitions, panels to discuss water-related subjects, and an exposition known as "Discovering water", held in 1999 at the National Center of Sciences. National authorities, as the Minister of Health, have participated in workshops on water quality. Various public and private entities, as well as national authorities, are part of the organizing committee. Private enterprises contribute with awards for the winners of the competitions. The media participation has also been increasingly encouraged.

### *Suriname*

Celebrations in Suriname have received broad press coverage with activities such as placement of panels in public areas, design competitions, journalistic interviews, and expositions with presence of authorities, schools, and the population in general. In addition to the participation of public and private entities, schools and cultural institutions, children, and young people have established their own working groups to enrich the celebrations. Every year, preparatory meetings are held and various activities are programmed by different groups in large cities. Private enterprises have broad participation; the press covers main events, from the convocation to the Inter-American Water Day up to the delivery of awards to the winners of the competitions. Organizers are planning to expand the decentralization of activities and establish a Water Day Foundation to strengthen the celebration at the national level.

### *Colombia*

In Colombia, Clubs of Water Supporters widely participate in the celebrations. These clubs, that were created in schools, have more than 15,000 associates. Local sanitation and water supply enterprises also carry out intense activities during the event; they organize seminars and panels on water-related topics.

### *Ecuador*

The activities of the Inter-American Water Day are gaining increasing importance in Ecuador and are carried out in several provinces. In addition to the support of private enterprises, the Guayaquil newspaper *El Universo* contributes disseminating the subject and activities. An important initiative developed by the Ministry of Health is the dissemination of household water treatment alternatives, especially in regions of poor water supply or lack of treatment systems.

### *Belize*

As in other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, Belize has still deficiencies in water supply, which affects mainly the children. Thus, the topics that focus on this problem have great receptivity, as the celebrations of the Inter-American Water Day in 1999. One of the principal events is the Water Fair, that attracts great number of public, especially students of schools of the capital. The press –especially radio and television– participate in the dissemination of the importance of water resources and the activities programmed for that date.

#### *Haiti*

Children participation during the Inter-American Water Day has been increasing in Haiti. An event that attracted significant attention was a competition of poetry and design on the subject “Water and the children of Haiti”, carried out in 1999, when the celebrations were presided by the Minister of Health. An exposition of water-related products and equipment attracted numerous visitors that year.

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## **Annex. Report of the Inter-American Water Day and the Water Week (1992-2000)**

**1992.** In November, three organizations –the Inter-American Association of Sanitary Engineering, the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association, and the Pan American Health Organization– signed a declaration in the XXIII Inter-American Congress of AIDIS, in Havana, and created the Inter-American Water Day on the first Saturday of October of every year.

**1993.** The Inter-American Water Day was held for the first time on the first Saturday of October. The regional theme selected was “Water is life and health” and the regional material produced were several pamphlets on water economy and water-borne diseases, a poster with the theme, and a publication with the Declaration of the Inter-American Water Day. Furthermore, the article entitled “Riesgos para la salud asociados con la contaminación de las aguas recreacionales costeras (*Health Hazards associated with contamination of coastal recreational waters*)” was published. This article identifies infectious diseases that can be transmitted during bathing or ingestion of raw wastewater or partially cooked fish or shellfish from the coast.

**1994.** The subject chosen was “Water and Your Environment”, framed in the chapter on quality protection and fresh water supply, from the Agenda 21. The following materials of regional distribution were produced: a pamphlet on groundwater: *Groundwater, our hidden resource*; other pamphlet that addressed water pollution and health, while a third one was entitled *Invest in you future, preserve water today*. Furthermore, a poster was prepared with the slogan “Water is precious, let’s protect and preserve it.” The regional proposal concentrated on drinking water-related subjects. The material produced, targeted at schools and the general public, had the following objectives: to raise awareness on the importance of groundwater in the continent and identify its possible contamination sources; to specify the effects of polluted water ingestion on health, and to describe simple procedures to prevent contamination of drinking water sources.

**1995.** The general theme in the Region was “Water, a heritage that must be preserved.” The objective was to underline the need for preserving surface and groundwater sources, as well as basin management through integrated and effective approaches to protect human health and aquatic ecosystems. The main concern disseminated that year was contamination of rivers, lakes, and aquifers increasing public health problems and hindering future generations to enjoy those sources. It was suggested to include the effect of basin degradation on human health and ecosystems due to chemicals such as toxic pollutants, domestic wastewater, pesticides, and fertilizers. The problems related to water quality focused on basins and solutions were presented for water supply to small localities and large cities. It was also recommended to disseminate practical measures for the conservation of sources and cascades. The materials prepared were the following: a pamphlet *Protegiendo nuestra agua para proteger la vida (Protecting our water to protect life)*, another pamphlet with the regional theme as main title, and a poster distributed with the same slogan. The pamphlet *Agua, un patrimonio para preservar (Water, a heritage that must be preserved)* addressed the commitment with the environment and raised awareness among the population and government with regard to water as a finite resource that must be protected.

**1996.** The common subject for the Region was: “Water, valuable as life. Let’s preserve it!” The material distributed in Latin America and the Caribbean was a pamphlet dealing with the general topic. One of the basic approaches suggested in 1996 was to analyze water as an essential component of all terrestrial ecosystems and to focus on the typical problems of multiple uses of ecosystems. The generalized scarcity of water as well as the gradual destruction and contamination in many regions require planning and integrated management of water resources. This integration should encompass both surface and ground water and should consider quantity and quality aspects. In addition the *1993-1995 Report on the celebrations of the Inter-American Water Day*, was published; it records the creation, development, and institutionalization of the Inter-American celebration.

**1997.** “Safe water: source of life” was the subject agreed upon for the entire Region in 1997. The materials prepared were a guide for managing school health services in Latin America and the Caribbean, a working guide with the community, called *El derecho a tener agua segura (The right to have safe water)*, and a poster with the general theme for that year. In addition, the PAHO Division of Health and Environment published, *La calidad del agua y su salud (Water quality and health)*, for wide dissemination. The *Guía de gestión de los servicios higiénicos escolares en América Latina y el Caribe (Management guide for hygienic facilities at schools in Latin America and the Caribbean)* is a document conceived as a working tool to provide adequate hygienic facilities to students, educators, and school administrators. *The right to have safe water* is a pamphlet –especially for community organizations– that suggests ideas to carry out collective celebrations to highlight the importance of having safe water. The approach focused on the relation between water quality and the incidence of diarrheal diseases, including cholera. The emphasis was the result of the recommendation of Latin American and Caribbean promoters, since water supply in inadequate conditions continues to be a public health problem and is the leading cause of cholera outbreak in the continent. The central point of the alert was the incidence of water-borne diseases, solutions to reduce them, education based on the importance of maintaining adequate hygiene guidelines, and drinking water protection. Promoters suggested that countries emphasize the fact that water-borne diseases imply losses of financial and human resources, and that children are the population segment most prone to suffer diarrhea and other diseases produced by polluted water consumption.

**1998.** The year theme was “Let’s participate to have clean water for all”. The regional materials were a guide for educational centers addressing water quality at schools, a publication known as *Participemos para que todos tengamos agua limpia (Let’s participate to have clean water for all)* and a poster-calendar with the theme. In a region where microbiologically unsafe water constitutes a serious problem for public health, the general theme underlined the need for people to be aware of health risks and the role that the community plays in the struggle against diseases. The *Guía para centros educativos: agua de calidad en la escuela (Guide for educational centers: quality water at school)* emphasizes the importance of drinking water from the microbiological perspective and focuses on health problems of polluted water for schoolchildren and the community. *Let’s participate... so we can have clean water for all* emphasizes the fact that having clean water is a challenge for the different sectors of the society.

**1999.** “The right of all children to drinking water. Let’s assume the commitment” was the regional motto selected for 1999. A working guide on water and environmental sanitation was distributed at schools and communities of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as a poster

with the slogan *Children in action*. The pamphlet *Niños y niñas en acción. Guía de trabajo sobre agua y saneamiento ambiental en las escuelas y comunidades de América Latina y el Caribe (Boys and girls in action. Working guide on water and environmental sanitation at schools and communities of Latin America and the Caribbean)* was a document especially conceived for schools and was written in simple language for children. UNICEF joined the initiative of the Inter-American Water Day. Children rights to drinking water and adequate sanitation were addressed. The vision pointed out the right of each child to drinking water as a human right and as an vital element to combat diseases and protect the environment. It was emphasized that water-borne diseases hinder healthy growth and the development of millions of children and that diarrheal diseases continue to be the leading cause of death among children under 5 years old in the Region. Another point that deserved special attention was that the lack of access to drinking water represented a significant waste of time and energy for many women and children who have to walk large distances with heavy vessels. On the occasion of the Inter-American Water Day it was suggested, in addition, that government authorities, educators, community leaders, and parents take advantage of the opportunity to prepare comprehensive programs designed to protect children rights. A Web page on the Inter-American Water Day is available at CEPIS site: <<http://www.cepis.org.pe>>.

**2000.** The theme throughout the Region was “Water, every drop counts: let’s use it wisely.” The document *Water, every drop counts: let’s use it wisely. Working guide on water* was distributed with summarized and updated information to support water promotion as a vital resource, as well as a promotional poster on the subject. The Web page created in 1999 has been enriched and the process toward a Virtual Library has begun. All materials available on the Inter-American celebration have been introduced. A discussion list has been created and mechanisms are presented for evaluating the activities related to the Inter-American Water Day.