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SOUTH AFRICAN WATER JUSTICE ROUNDTABLES

We are at a critical juncture in South Africa as communities facing the detrimental impacts of water and climate crises collide with a neoliberal state propelled by international financial institutions to facilitate corporate water grabs. These water grabs have taken various forms in South Africa from the privatization of water and sanitation services to neoliberal “conservation” strategies aimed at promoting the financialization of freshwater resources.

The Blue Planet Project, the African Water Commons Collective, the Surplus People Project and Tshintsha Amakhaya are hosting a three-part series of national water justice roundtables between September 2018 and May 2019. Our goal is to bring together key water justice groups, community activists and academics in order to collectively map out a water strategy for South Africa. We will draw from the lessons learned through the Cape Town water crisis in order to develop concrete alternatives that will form the basis of a people-driven plan for a national water justice strategy that would put the interests of people and the planet above profit.

Context

The roundtable discussions will be built around by three important elements that have shaped public discourse and the experiences of frontline communities around access to fresh water in South Africa over the last decade.

1. Water scarcity and climate change

The city of Cape Town made global headlines earlier this year when it announced it would be the first city in the world to run out of water. Water reservoirs serving the city’s four million residents were running perilously low in the summer months after a three-year drought. Although day zero was eventually postponed from 2018 to 2019, Cape Town is not out of the woods yet. The city has proposed a series of solutions to drastically reduce consumption and tap into new sources of water.

Community activists have challenged many proposed measures that threaten to place a greater burden on poor households while enabling corporate users to continue accessing huge and unsustainable amounts of water within the city and its surrounding areas. Residents are also pushing back against expensive technological fixes aimed at attracting foreign investments with little promise of serving the water needs of marginalized communities. There are currently vast inequities in the post-apartheid city where 25 percent of the population does not have access to piped water in the house. Yet these injustices continue to be ignored by those in power. Instead,



the very policies purportedly designed to improve the water crisis threaten to exacerbate these deep historical inequities.

The water justice roundtables will draw from the experiences of Cape Town activists to explore equitable, social-justice-based strategies to address water scarcity.

2. Privatization and corporate water grabbing

South African water policy is being shaped by a World-Bank led consortium of international financial institutions and big multinationals including Coca Cola, Nestlé, Pepsi and SAB Miller called the 2030 Water Resources Group (2030 WRG). Under the guidance of the 2030 WRG, South Africa has tied its water usage plan with economic growth objectives.

In South Africa, the group operates through a multi-stakeholder body called the Strategic Water Partners Network, which brings big beverage companies, the mining industry and the banking sector together with government agencies with the objective of promoting green growth strategies. These strategies include expensive technological fixes like desalination, which serves the dual purpose of attracting more private investors to the water and sanitation sector and augmenting freshwater availability for a range of uses. The multi-stakeholder body also heavily promotes market-based resource allocation and conservation strategies that turn water resources and user rights into financial assets, a process referred to as financialization.

The water justice roundtables will share the work of researchers studying corporate water grabs with grassroots activists fighting neoliberal water policies on the ground.

3. Land and water rights

There is currently a heated debate regarding land rights and land redistribution measures that would correct historical injustices in South Africa. Missing from these discussions is a deeper analysis of the implications of land reform on water rights and access to water. The water justice roundtables aim to examine what redistributive justice looks like when it comes to access to water and water services.

How

We will be holding three water justice roundtable discussions in South Africa between September 2018 and March 2019. They will bring policy analysts and academics together with directly impacted people and grassroots campaigns. We aim to engage groups from various



sectors in different parts of the country in order to construct a plan that addresses water justice in South Africa out of our various grassroots campaigns and activities.

The second roundtable will be held in December 2018 and will deal with rural struggles for community water rights and control over local water resources.

The third roundtable will deal with struggles for access to water and sanitation services.

Roundtable 1

Date and location : Cape Town, September 18 and 19, 2018

The September meeting will bring together core groups and individuals engaged in water justice struggles throughout the country in order to work out a process for building a national water justice strategy. We will involve key groups and individuals already actively engaged in water justice campaigns and struggles in order to identify the broad strokes of a campaign, key partners and an engagement strategy.

Preliminary objectives:

- Map out water justice struggles in South Africa: who are the key actors, what are the challenges, what are the solutions sought, what are the major trends, what are the opportunities for engagement.
- Identify partners and engagement strategies: whom should we involve as partners, how do we mobilize broader segments of the population including other activists from other movements, artists, progressive media etc.
- Develop a process for constructing a water justice blueprint that includes strategies for engaging community activists whose lived experience should foreground all policy analysis.

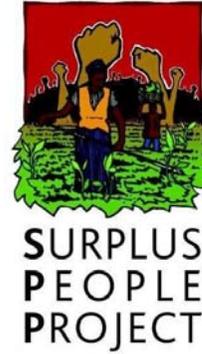
Roundtable 2: Rural water struggles

Date and location: TBC

The second roundtable will be held in December 2018 and will deal specifically with rural struggles for community water rights and control over local water resources. It will coincide with a conference being organized by the Surplus People Project and Tshintsha Amakhaya bringing together small farmers and other rural communities from across the country.



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Preliminary objectives:

- Bring together experts and frontline activists to share knowledge and expertise regarding corporate water resource grabs and commodification.
- Engage frontline communities in articulating a national vision for water justice grounded in local struggles
- Map out threats and identify opportunities for engagement in 2019 and 2020: what are the opportunities for creating change? How do we push for a shifts in policy and public discourse?

Roundtable 3: Urban struggles against the privatization of water and sanitation systems

The third roundtable will be held in April to coincide with the Housing Assembly's Political School in Cape Town which brings together urban water justice activists fighting metering and the privatization of water and sanitation systems.

Preliminary objectives:

- Bring together experts and frontline activists to share knowledge and expertise regarding the privatization of water and sanitation services in South Africa.
- Engage frontline communities in articulating a national vision for water justice grounded in local struggles
- Map out threats and identify opportunities for engagement in 2019 and 2020: what are the opportunities for creating change? How do we push for a shifts in policy and public discourse?

Convenors

The African Water Commons Collective
Tshintsha Amakhaya
Surplus People Project
Blue Planet Project

Roundtable 1 - participating organizations

Housing Assembly (Cape Town)
International Labour Research and Information Group (Cape Town)
Water Crisis Coalition (Cape Town)



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GroundWork Environmental Justice Action (Durban)
Earth Life Africa (Johannesburg)
Rural Women's Assembly (national)
Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE)
Women on Farms (Cape Winelands)
Ntinga Ntaba kaNdoda
Casual Workers Advice Office (Gauteng)
Alternative Energy Popular Education Programme (Cape Town)
WoMin (Africa – regional)
DAWN - Development Alternatives for Women for A New Era (National)
Environmental Monitoring Group (Cape Town)
Water Caucus (South Africa – national)
Socio-economic Rights Institute, SERI (Johannesburg)
South Durban community environmental alliance, SDCEA (Durban)
CASSAWU (Western Cape)
Food Sovereignty Campaign
Alternative Information Development Centre (Cape Town)
Popular Education Program (Cape Town)
Water Caucus, Western Cape
Water Caucus, Eastern Cape
Center for Environmental Rights
Vaal Environmental Justice Association
Tembalihle Crisis Committee (Soweto)
The Poor Flat Dwellers (Durban)
Alliance for Rural Democracy (National)
Simunye Worker's Forum (Simunye)
Support Centre for Land Change
Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute
Public Services International (International)
Municipal Services Project (International)

For more information, please contact:

Faeza Meyer: africanwatercommonscollective@gmail.com

Koni Benson: konibenson@gmail.com

Meera Karunanathan: meera@canadians.org