

HIGH LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION

ON

**FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES TO
COMBAT THE GENDERED IMPACTS
OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF
WATER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**REPORT
MARCH 2022**

FOR **EQUALITY**

**Alternative World
Water Forum
(AWWF)**

About the Forum

The World Water Forum is a high-level convening by the World Water Council, a corporate-driven multi-stakeholder body that brings banks, transnational water companies, academics and public agencies together to mainly promote private sector solutions to water governance, management and delivery.

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Water justice activists further recognize that the struggle for water is an intersectional, internationalist struggle that needs a solid anti-capitalist, people-centered and feminist orientation.

Hence, the global water justice movement convenes a parallel forum called the Forum Alternatif Mondial de l'Eau (FAME) to showcase alternatives, learn together, plan together, and find new ways to live together.

The 2022 people's Alternative World Water Forum was convened in Dakar to offer learning opportunities, to mobilize, organize and unite the human rights access to water struggles in Africa with other anti-privatization struggles across the globe.



Water is life

"Culture, the fruit of history, reflects at every moment the material and spiritual reality of society..." - Antonio Gramsci

This poster series hopes to create spaces for conversations on the possibilities of feminist, political and popular education and cultural work. The continent of Africa has a long history of cultural production for the purposes of liberation and resistance as well for the recovery of radical histories and liberatory promises and futures. The African Resistance Collective and the Alternative World Water Forum 2022 believe that this work, telling

and weaving radical histories, and organizing against the various manifestations of the privatization of the water commons adds to the formidable cases of struggles unfolding on the continent. We hope that the first part of this series which we are presenting to you will be a valuable tool for anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-privatization organizing in Africa and beyond. **Water is life! Resistance and re-imagining the commons!**

The High-Level Dialogue on "Feminist Alternatives to combat the commodification of water in Southern Africa."



HIGH LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION

ON

"FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES TO COMBAT THE GENDERED IMPACTS OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA"



CRYSTAL SIMEONI
SPEAKER



IMMACULATA MALUZA
SPEAKER



WILLSON CHIVHANGA
MODERATOR



THANDOKAZI GEORGE
SPEAKER



MUKASIRI SIBANDA
SPEAKER



24th MARCH 2022
3PM to 4.30PM CAT

REGISTRATION LINK

tinyurl.com/FeministAlternatives

Neoliberalism views the water crisis as a technical issue caused by population increase, climate change and ineffective government, one that can be resolved by handing over the management of water services to the private sector.

Such an approach sees the United Nations (UN), which in 2010 famously passed a resolution recognizing the human right to water, become seemingly unlikely bedfellows of free-market cheerleaders like the World Bank (Urgent Action Fund, 2022)

The neoliberal approach to water further denigrates the capacity of African States to effectively resolve water scarcity; excuses State's lack of political will and commitment to providing water to the entire population; and gives room for manipulation of water resources for economic gains by private water companies to the detriment of the larger populace.

The feminist approach, on the other hand, insists that this neoliberal tactic is merely playing politics with water. It is opposed to this method because water privatization would create more inequality in an already unequal society.

Because it views to access and availability of clean water as a human right, it opines that the universality of human rights places a burden on governments to ensure equal access to water irrespective of social status. Privatization of water makes class the chief determinant of quality of access and enjoyment of water as a human right.

The gender dimension to water scarcity is typified by the heightened hardship from water scarcity due to Covid 19 pandemic. Not only did it promote violence against women in homes, it also exposed women to untold hardship from water scarcity because the economic means for purchase and enjoyment of water was lacking.



Rationale

It is against this background that For Equality convened a side event at the Alternative Water Forum under the theme, “Feminist alternatives to combat the gendered impacts of the commodification of water in East and Southern Africa” as a platform to proffer strong feminist and human rights-based alternatives to the water injustices we face in East and Southern Africa.

There is a need for global solutions as the challenges with water justice are similar for most countries

Objectives



- Call on governments and democratically elected representatives to stop using the neoliberal cost-recovery market rate model for water services and to break ties with companies seeking to make profits out of water and to put water under democratic systems and institutions.
- Join voices to protest and call for an end to the deliberate and cruel actions of building financial barriers to deny low-income households and communities safe drinking water through use of water prepaid meters and other so called electronic payment devices.
- Call for transparency, accountability and greater equity in the allocations and utilization of tax and donor funding in the water sector.
- Expose the inaction of governments which continues to abet the pillage by transnational companies of development resources of African and other developing nations

Dialogue Format

- The dialogue was delivered in the form of a panel discussion with 4 Speakers and moderated by Willson Chivhanga – Executive Director of For Equality.
- Crystal Simeoni – Director, NAWI Collective (Kenya)
- Mukasiri Sibanda – Coordinator, #StopTheBleeding Campaign (Zimbabwe)
- Thando George – Legal Researcher, Social Justice Coalition (South Africa)
- Immaculata Maluza – President, Women Lawyers Association (Malawi)

Key Issues Discussed


FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES TO COMBAT THE GENDERED IMPACTS OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
SPEAKER



THANDOKAZI GEORGE

Thandokazi George is a legal researcher and communications officer at the Social Justice Coalition in Cape Town. She holds a B-tech Degree in Marketing, a Bachelor of Laws degree and is currently a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) candidate at the University of Fort Hare. Her academic research focuses on the intersections between gender justice, safety, and sanitation for black women living in informal settlements. She is a Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung School on Social Democracy and Political Economy Alumni and Canon Collins Educational and Legal Assistance Trust Alumni. Thandokazi's leadership capabilities were recognized by the African Centre on Law and Ethics in the Legal Ethics Training Program, jointly organized by White & Case in Kigali, Rwanda. She believes that a country's success should be measured by how it protects its most vulnerable citizens.

THURSDAY 24th MARCH 2022  3PM to 4.30PM CAT






Thandokazi George

Question: What has been the experience of women living in informal settlements in accessing clean water?

- Due to the long distances between homes and communal water access points, women have been subjected to sexual violence and other violent crimes, including loss of lives
- Increased cases of violence faced by women in attempts to access water has caused mental health challenges for women, as they are faced with fear and anxiety related to the possible forms of violence, they are prone to face on their journey to access communal water facilities
- Dignified access to water and sanitation is one other challenge, in most communal areas, there are 8 toilets that are placed to cater to 1,000 people
- Communal facilities are not gender-responsive, as they do not meet the needs of people with disability, hence they are required to source support from family members to help them access the facilities
- Commodification of water has resulted in the government not prioritizing water justice in informal settlements. Those who cannot afford clean water are left to use communal facilities which are not being maintained hence causing sanitation challenges

Question: Why should we care about the issues of water justice, water, and sanitation?

- Access to water is a basic human right, when the state fails to ensure equal access to clean water and sanitation, women and girls bear the brunt of this inequality mostly because of their traditionally assigned reproductive and practical gender needs that require the usage of water
- Water inequalities affect women's active participation, employment, economic development, and community work
- Human rights are interdependent, universal, interconnected-when water is commodified, it means denying women the agency, productivity, and right to live dignified lives

Question: Why is the Government failing to provide water in informal settings such as Khayelitsha, South Africa?

- The government argues that it is geographically challenging and not viable to put in place adequate water and sanitation infrastructure in informal settlements
- There is a known culture of criminalizing informality, the government fails to acknowledge the existence of informal settlements and criminalizes those living there, in most cases, they are subjected to random and unwarranted evictions
- Due to the housing crisis that the government fails to prioritize, people opt for other means of living, which for most is to move to informal settlements and are subjected to various social justice challenges. This challenge worsened with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which left many families displaced
- South Africa, like many other African countries has flawed water policies which do not speak to equitable water delivery and fail to address lived realities and challenges faced by people in informal settlements

Key Issues Discussed

FAME 2022
ADVANCING THE RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES TO COMBAT THE GENDERED IMPACTS OF
THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

SPEAKER



IMMACULATA MALUZA

Immaculata Maluza is an accomplished human rights lawyer with 7 years of experience in using strategic litigation to advance the rights of vulnerable groups. Immaculata has an LLB (Hons) from the University of Aberystwyth, Bar Professional Training Course (City Law School, London) and she completed the Malawi Legal Practitioners Qualifying Course (MILE). Immaculata is currently working as the DPP Programme Lawyer for Irish Rule of International and is also the President of the Women Lawyers Association. Immaculata also specializes in project design, management, and resource mobilization. She has created and managed several successful projects which have improved access to rights for people with mental disabilities, sex workers, LGBTQIA+ persons, women, and children to mention a few.

THURSDAY 24th MARCH 2022 3PM to 4.30PM CAT

SOCIAL JUSTICE COALITION WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CENTRE FOR EQUALITY NAW!

Immaculata Maluza

Question: Why is access to water a problem when it's a human right?

- The right to water is a fundamental human right and is recognized in international human rights law such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Malawi does not have a standalone law that speaks to water justice but the right to water can be drawn from articles 30 and 29 of the Constitution which speak to other rights
- Communities are not aware of their fundamental right to clean water, hence they believe it is their responsibility to find means of accessing water. In areas such as Chiradzulu, there are 2 boreholes that are meant to supply water to over 4,000 people and when the boreholes become faulty, community members believe that it is the responsibility of the village committee to fix the problem and not the government
- The scarcity of clean water access points means that the energy and time spent by women and girls to access water increases, leading to a decrease in their participation in other productive activities such as education for girls and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Question: Are paid water meters legal and what possible legal actions can be taken to address challenges faced by communities who are unfairly billed and denied access to water?

- The National Water Resources Authority and Water Board are the two institutions that are mandated to address all water-related challenges, which means complaints are supposed to be taken up with them
- As per international law, denying individual access to water-based on their inability to pay their water bills is illegal and there have been repercussions in other countries, but for Malawi, we are not there yet

Mukasiri Sibanda

Question: What are some macro-economic challenges that are affecting access to water?

- Inequity in water access has direct impacts on all aspects of livelihood, it affects food security, employment, health, education, and more. Hence, it should be a top priority for governments to invest and ensure universal access for all
- Crippled fiscal capabilities have directly impacted the provision of basic essential human rights necessities such as clean water and sanitation
- At the macro-economic level, greedy multinational corporations whose top priority is to increase profits at the expense of human rights, continue to exploit the government and cripple the ability of government to mobilize resources through tax evasion and exploitation.
- Purification of water is another key issue that needs to be prioritized by governments

Question: What are the alternatives to challenge and hold private sector accountable?

- There is a need for global solutions as the challenges with water justice are similar for most countries
- African countries must unite and create Pan-African solutions
- Multidimensional approach must be employed to address water justice in all the areas it intersects with
- Actions must be taken to address corrupt political elites who refuse to challenge the repressive policies because they continue to benefit from the illicit financial flows and from maintaining the status quo



 FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES TO COMBAT THE GENDERED IMPACTS OF
 THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

SPEAKER



CRYSTAL SIMEONI

Crystal Simeoni is a Pan African feminist activist working on macro-level economic issues. She currently serves as the Director of Nawi - Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective (The Nawi Collective). In her role as director, Crystal curates the work of the collective towards contributing to building a feminist community in Africa of individuals and organizations working on influencing, analyzing, deconstructing, and reconstructing macroeconomic policies, narratives. Before this, she was head of Advocacy with a focus on Economic Justice at FEMNET and was the Policy Lead of the Tax and the International Financial Architecture at TJN-A before that. She is currently an Atlantic Fellow for Social and Economic Equity at the London School of Economics.

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Crystal Simeoni

Question: Why is water justice a feminist issue and why should it be looked at from a macro-economics perspective?

- Access to clean water and sanitation is not only a human rights issue, it is also an issue of sustainable development SDG 6 rightly put it
- Water affects different aspects of life, including adequate standards of living, health, education, and energy
- Water is also political that is linked to the global neoliberal agenda spearheaded by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS)
- Neoliberalism calls for a cascade approach to the problem of water; proposing private solutions to public problems through advising governments to tweak their political framework and allow private investments to address social problems such as the water crisis
- The water crisis cannot be addressed without looking into the role of the neoliberal agenda in the solutions implemented by governments

Question: What are the alternatives?

- ·There is a need to implement a people-centered approach to economic development
- ·A reversal in current social contracts is needed, to get there, efforts must be made to ensure consciousness building for citizens to be able to claim and call for change
- ·An intersectional approach to solutions by movements is key
- ·Advocates must work closely with community members and listen to their problems and solutions
- ·Citizens should interrogate government policies and hold duty bearers accountable
- ·A strong feminist movement needs to be built and strengthened to drive change

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Other comments



- There is shrinking civic space for women in communities to engage in activism for water justice and WASH initiatives
- Social activists and feminists should utilize the Constitution to advocate for water justice
- Meaningful leadership of women in the community and local leadership is very important in the fight for water justice, but the patriarchal system creates a barrier for women to engage in local councils on water management issues
- There's a need for strengthened coordination for the women's movements across Africa to address issues faced by African women and connect to global and regional spaces such as CSW66
- Efforts must be made to deconstruct and reconstruct the system from a pan-African lens

[Watch the Webinar Recording here](#)