

THE AFRICA WATER NETWORK (AWN) AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WATER PRIVATIZATION IN AFRICA

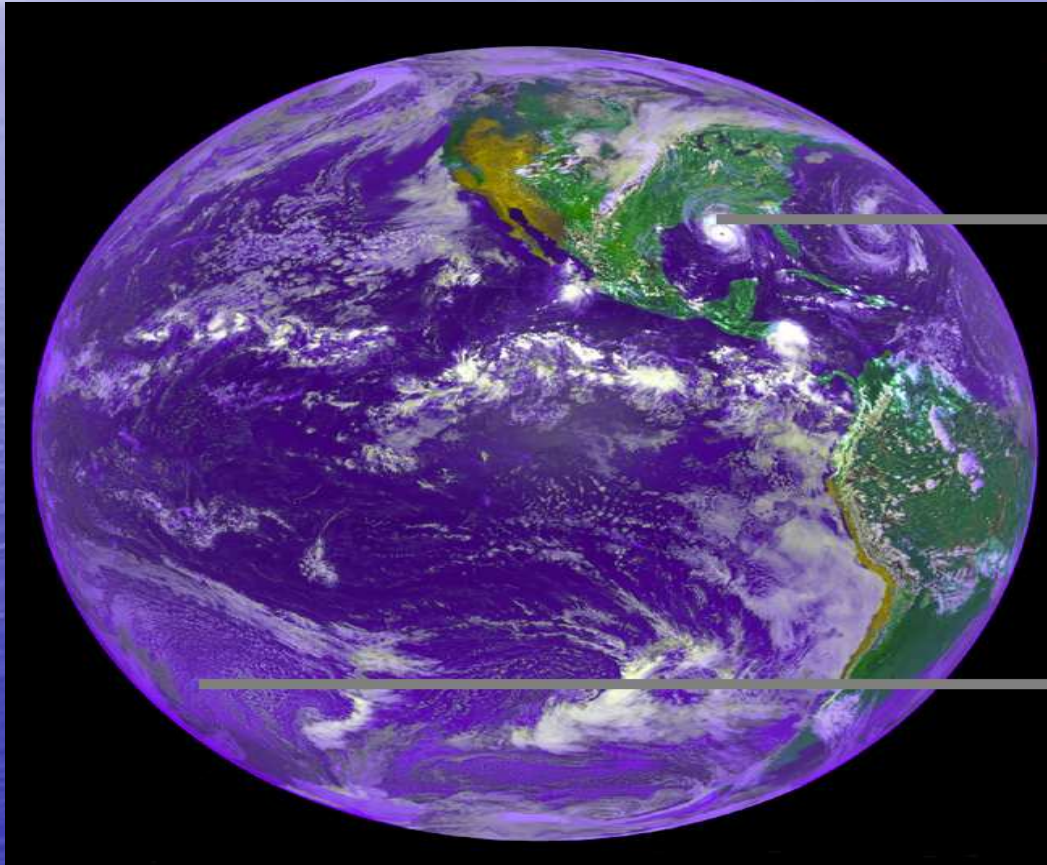
by:

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The World Has large Bodies of Water, but they are increasingly becoming un-fit for Human Consumption due to Pollution



Outline

- Introduction to Africa Water Network (AWN)
- Africa – Overview of the Water Services
- AWN's Struggle against Water Privatization in Africa
- What are the Alternatives
- How will AWN work
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Conclusion

A: Introduction to the Africa Water Network (AWN)

i. Background

- The African Water Network (AWN) was formed and Launched in January 2007 in Nairobi Kenya, during the World Social Forum (WSF).
- It was formed by Participants of the Social Forum from different Countries in Africa in collaboration with other Water Activists and Partners from around the Globe
- Though it was launched at the WSF, the idea of Forming such a Unifying body was brought out early in 2006

Introduction Cont...

ii. Objectives of the AWN

- To Bring together African Water Activists in One Network
- To amplify the voices of local Water activists at International Level
- To serve as a channel to link the Water Activists in Africa with their fellows in the outside world
- To generate and Share information on Water Issues within and out of Africa

Introduction Cont...

iii. Principles of the AWN

- To fight against water privatisation in all its forms
- To ensure participatory public control and management of water resources
- Oppose all forms of prepaid water meters
- Ensure that water is enshrined in national constitutions as a human right
- Ensure that the provision of water is a national project solely in the public domain

Introduction Cont...

iv. Membership in the AWN

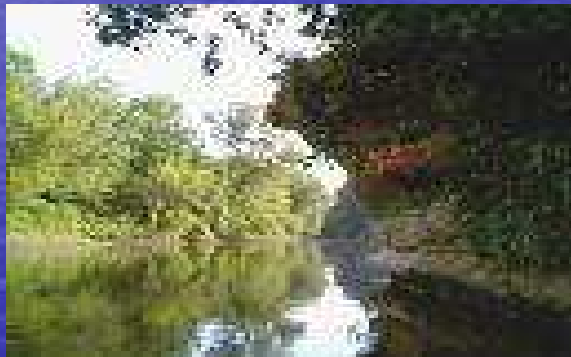
- Membership is open to all Organizations in Africa who agree with above Principles



- Members must agree with the Principles and be willing to pursue their implementation in their local areas/countries

B: Africa – Overview of the Water Situation

- Every day, 30,000 children die from water related disease in the Third World, most of whom are in Sub-Saharan Africa (WPA – Wole Akande, 2002)
- Many African Countries have very poor water infrastructure and technology – pipes, sewage systems, operating machines, billing systems etc.



- Neglect of Water Services for a long has been a common characteristic of water services in many sub-Saharan countries
- In many African Countries, no measures are put to ensure water sustainability – no water harvesting, no water reserves, no legal and policy measures, etc
- Due to prolonged failures in provision of proper water services in Africa, the World Bank and IMF started forcing countries to privatize the water services provision – in exchange for ‘more’ loans

C: AWN's Struggle against Water Privatization in Africa

i. Why Oppose Water Privatization

- Private investors are not attracted by poor and rural communities – which constitute the majority of the African Population – hence need for government care for these communities



- Private investors tend to focus on tariff collection as a measure for success and not customers' satisfaction – and when the latter comes, it's merely a way of maximizing profits

Why Oppose... Cont...

- Privatization has always led to entrenchment of Workers – as a mechanism to maximize profits
- Water is the basic human need for survival, commercializing water means commercializing people's lives in exchange for corporate profits and taxes
- Properly ran Public Water Authorities can well operate water services, without the need to involve the profit-oriented corporate firms
- The International Legal Framework gives no room for governments to act against the “investors” in case of failure, and instead it grants these multinational corporations opportunities to sue governments in case of any problem at the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). Tanzania is a good case, others are Burundi, Cameroon, Argentina*

Why Oppose... Cont...

- Water privatization has always not been the selection of the people and their governments in the African Countries – it's imposed by donors, hence they do not serve the interests of the people in their own countries

Examples of African Countries with IMF-Imposed water privatization and cost recovery policies: Tanzania, Angola, Benin, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Senegal (Source: IMF, Globalization Challenge Initiative and afrol.com)

- Being an implant of the Donors, Multinational Companies and Rich Countries, the whole idea of forced privatization end up in undermining the sovereignty of the LDCs governments and their control over the resources hence increasing the former's influence

CASE STUDY OF PRIVATIZATION FAILURE

- A Research by Public Services International research Unit (2005) looking at 400 large Cities in the World showed that almost Half of the Cities that have tried Privatization have Experienced Serious Problems – ranging from Major Operational problems to the Termination of Contract

D: What are the Alternatives

- Build strong Public Utilities bodies to operate water and related services in African Countries
- Build, enhance and retain the capacity of the personnel in these institutions
- Promote the local means of harvesting and reserving water sustainably
- Always involve the public in planning and implementation of the water projects to avoid distortion of the water infrastructure like pipes and tapes
- Governments should establish financial mechanisms for ensuring water availability and accessibility to ALL people, regardless of their economic or social status.
- This can be done by establishing special funds for water – e.g. the case of Tanzania in roads construction and maintenance

Alternatives Cont...

- Promote the culture within the Business sector of having Corporate Social Funds to support the public with different social services, in particular water
- Encourage more not-for-profit organizations to focus on providing water services



- Promote environmental conservation and protection, to enable sustainability of natural sources of water and hence avoid the need for advanced technology for water extraction - that has always been used as a reason to promote privatization

- Encourage the development and Use of Locally Developed and cheap technologies for harvesting and reserving water
- Establish, Implement and Maintain strong mechanisms for Good governance, transparency and accountability within the government systems.
- Building the Culture of caring and maintaining Public Utilities – Long term neglect has always been the cause of failure

E: How will AWN Work

- The AWN currently has its secretariat in Ghana
- After the launching, in January 2007 – Nairobi Kenya, a team of 6 people was formed to make a Task Force responsible for preparation of the General Meeting of the Network.
- The meeting is scheduled to take place in September, 2007. This first general meeting will be used to discuss and decide the way forward of the Network
- Generally, AWN will be working with water activists both in Africa and Around the Globe to ensure the achievement of the five Principles.
- Currently, AWN members are engaging in sharing of Information and fact about Water within Africa and Around the world. This is done in collaboration with other Water activists' organizations and Networks
- Blue Planet, Food and Water Watch, World Development Movement (WDM) are some good examples of International Organizations working hand-in-hand with AWN

F: Challenges and Opportunities

- Being a newly established Network, the AWN is yet to establish a strategic plan for implementing its activities so as to achieve its objects and meeting its principles
- The Promoters of Water privatization are strong and organized too, to make sure they succeed. This makes it more challenging, given their financial capacity and hence more likely to influence decisions by governments

Challenges and Opportunities, Cont...

- However, despite the presence of those challenges, the AWN boasts the presence of long experienced and committed members who are capable of making the goals achievable
- Also the AWN networks with many other individuals and organizations from all over the world and hence being able stay informed about the different issues taking place around the world related relation to water

G: Conclusion

- Securing clean and safe water for all is increasingly becoming a global challenge, that needs, beyond financial capacity, committed people and committed governments
- As the Civil Society stands a great chance of influencing decision-making at different levels – Water should now always be put on top of the agenda
- The size and complexity of the Water challenge necessitates the need for more people and organizations to come together, closer and join forces through different Networks- like EWN and AWN. The challenge is by far too complex and demanding to be addressed in separation by individuals
- I would like to use this opportunity to call for all Water Activists in Africa to join this the Africa Water Network (AWN) for the future of Water Sustainability in Africa – and for the those from the rest of the World – to join hands with us in our struggles!!



Thanks For Your Attention!!

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