

The 2013 ICCR Water Roundtable

Community Voices for Global Water Justice

On February 8th, 2013, ICCR hosted its first Water Roundtable on the Human Right to Water, convening 70 representatives from corporations, NGOs and community groups from around the world. Participants looked for ways to improve collaboration in identifying good practices related to corporate water use, and in developing frameworks for programs that uphold the Human Right to Water for communities in water-stressed areas of the world.

International community leaders with ICCR staff, on the eve of the 2013 ICCR Water Roundtable.



Front row, left to right:

Nanette Antequisa (ECOWEB), Nadira Narine (ICCR), Dorothy Bassett (Pennsylvania Community), Chris Chisoni (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Church), David Schilling (ICCR), Maria Herrera (Community Water Center).

Back row, left to right:

Shentu Jun (Qiantang River Waterkeeper Program), Sophea Lay (Development and Partnership in Action), Ajaykumaran Nair (Plachimada Solidarity Committee), Fr. Marco Arana Zegarra (GRUFIDES), Paula Biraaro (Uganda Human Rights Commission), Delmar and Christine Bennett (MEAN), Cesar Cardenas (Observatorio Ciudadano de Servicios Publicos).

"Communities along the Mekong are experiencing more intense droughts as well as flash flooding. Learning to cope with climate changes is becoming an important new challenge."

Sophea Lay, Development and Partnership in Action, Cambodia

"We are engaging government agencies but where we are most challenged in our engagements (on water issues) is with corporations. We direct our efforts to empowering community engagement."

Nanette Antequisa, ECOWEB, The Philippines

"I read the ICCR document and saw water is a human right and I said 'Wow. I didn't know that.' I thought you just live and what you get is what you get."

Christine and Delmar Bennett, Mossville Environmental Action Now (MEAN), Mossville, Louisiana

"Because I was raised by farm worker parents, I had the privilege of experiencing agriculture from both sides: its benefits and its impacts. This is why it is such a privilege to be able to work with so many residents and families like mine, who want to ensure that we are not forced to choose between having a job and clean drinking water. We should be able to have both." Maria Herrera, Community Water Center, Visalia, California

"We need to be good stewards of God's creation. God and countless villages are with us on this journey. Together we can do it!" Fr. Marco Arana Zegarra, Grupo de Formacion e Intervencion para el Desarrollo Sostenible (GRUFIDES), Peru

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Community members, corporate representatives and ICCR members share their perspectives on water scarcity during a Roundtable small group discussion.

We live in a world of increasingly constrained physical resources. Yet, these very constraints impel us to develop ever more creative solutions to supply our needs. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility's (ICCR) Multi-Stakeholder Roundtable on the Human Right to Water held in New York City on February 8, 2013, brought together civil society organizations and affected community members, faith-based investors and company representatives to address the growing problem and impact of water scarcity on communities and business. While those present did not agree on all points and positions, the Roundtable underscored how ongoing, multi-stakeholder discussions are critical to achieving progress on difficult issues.

The work of the UN Special Rapporteur Catarina de Albuquerque has been instrumental in providing guidance on what the human right to water means in practice – for governments, communities and corporations. The Roundtable



Patricia Jones guides one of the Roundtable's many discussions.

sought to build on that work, by bringing diverse perspectives and experiences to the table to encourage more effective engagement among stakeholders who depend on water. Different stakeholders, naturally, have distinct water needs, and therefore different entry points in any discussion regarding water use and scarcity. Ordinary people find themselves grappling with declining well levels, decreased rainfall, and water sources so polluted they are unusable. Companies, for their part, worry about whether they will have sufficient water for their operations, or how they will deal with water-related disruptions in their operations and supply chains.

Our discussions clarified that there is not one single entity with authority to make all necessary decisions related to access to water. Acting alone, companies, community groups and governments are unable to effectively address the issue. All stakeholders bring their own experiences to the discussion, and contribute to a deeper, more com-



Cathy Rowan of Trinity Health, and Patricia Jones of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee listen as Shentu Jun of the Qiantang River Waterkeeper Program speaks about water scarcity.



Fr. Marco Arana Zegarra of GRUFIDES, with his translator, listens intently during a small group discussion.

prehensive, and collective understanding of the challenges faced in implementing the right to water. Only by working together can we achieve more equitable and just management of water resources.

Participants sought to identify and build good practices related to community sustainability and corporate water programs to protect communities' access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water. We listened to each other and engaged in thoughtful dialogue, and learned afresh that we are much more effective and imaginative when we work collaboratively. As human beings we have the capacity to organize ourselves, to problem solve, and to create a world where the fulfillment of the human right to water becomes a reality. Let us take concrete steps together in the months ahead to make progress on realizing the human right to water for the benefit of all.



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Stakeholder Responsibilities In Managing Access To Water

ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Without access to relevant and detailed information, communities cannot exercise their right to participate in decisions that affect their rights, nor effectively consent to local water projects.

COMMUNITIES NEED:

- To be invited to participate in dialogues with decision-makers in companies;
- To be included in impact/due diligence assessments and studies;
- Studies provided in appropriate formats, with technical specificity and the necessary local languages; and,
- Clear descriptions of issues that will be important to water quality and access.

ROLE OF COMPANIES

Companies need to recognize water as a public good across their operations, particularly in water-stressed areas. As a starting point, companies need to develop and share baseline information on water – including water availability in areas of their direct operations, and their own water use, withdrawals and discharges.

Key questions for companies to ask:

1. What level of assessment do we need?
2. Has extraction affected others' access to and quality of water?
3. How are our operations impacting the watershed?
4. Has our discharge of wastewater affected communities and ecosystems?

COMPANIES SHOULD:

- Respect international human rights standards like the *Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights* and consult with local stakeholders on how best to implement when local regulations and national laws conflict with those standards;
- Gain the consent of First Nations, where applicable, and local communities and provide them with their own resources to gain scientific and social information;
- Establish early and ongoing grievance mechanisms for solving disputes and remediating damages; and,
- In water-stressed areas, take proactive steps to limit impacts.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS

Under international human rights law, governments have the primary duty for upholding the human right to water. However, the capacity of states to uphold the human right to water has not kept pace with expanding global economic activity; businesses are gaining greater access to water, leaving governments scrambling to balance economic development with their duty to ensure access to water for all.

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- Consult with local authorities and community groups in decision-making that may impact water sources and their accessibility;
- Integrate the full range of regulatory requirements that protect drinking water resources, such as disclosure of assessments;
- When contracting, permitting, or licensing companies, include requirements specifying local & national recourse mechanisms for dispute resolution and remedies; and,
- Protect against mismanagement of financial resources allocated for implementation of the human right to water, and against bribing of officials in charge of monitoring/reporting complaints by affected communities.

ROLE OF INVESTORS

Even if companies manage water resources responsibly, they can face serious reputational risks and jeopardize their social licenses to operate if communities surrounding their operations lack access to clean water, or if other water users deplete or pollute shared water resources. In an era of increasing water scarcity, investors should be gauging companies on their ability to minimize water risks, and on how they are preparing to operate in a more water-constrained world.

INVESTORS SHOULD:

- Assess the water risk exposure of a company by seeking more information on how it is managing its physical, reputational, regulatory, and litigation water risks;
- Require robust corporate disclosure of how companies are evaluating, managing, and disclosing water risks in operations, and throughout their supply chains and ask companies to set water goals and reduction targets to mitigate risk; and,
- Ensure that companies are engaging all stakeholders – communities, government and investors.