

Water, food and climate crisis: Towards a Climate Justice Charter for South Africa

A Strategy Concept Note¹

1. Introduction and background

COPAC or the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre is 19 years old (see www.copac.org.za). It is a radical and transformative NGO that has been involved in grassroots development involving the eco-village in Ivory Park, pioneering post-apartheid cooperative development and promoting the solidarity economy, sustainable local manufacturing, cooperative banking, peoples housing and more. Since 2010, COPAC has been involved in linking solidarity economy building with food sovereignty. This led to COPAC being a co-founder and an active partner of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) and activities related to building food sovereignty and climate justice at the grassroots. The formation of the SAFSC, out of a national right to food conference in late 2014, was grounded in an awareness of the drought and its impacts in South Africa. This has been a crucial focus in SAFSC campaigning since then including through a Hunger Tribunal with the Human Rights Commission in 2015, food sovereignty festivals, a drought speak out, bread march and coal burial outside the Gupta estate in 2016 with various partner organisations, the development of a People's Food Sovereignty Act, activist tools on water sovereignty and sustainable land use, workshops on local and national practices of seed saving, as well as through local and national workshops and platforms to engage government and encourage the establishment of local food sovereignty sites and practices.

In particular, our activist guide on Water Sovereignty has been used to spark discussions in local communities about climate justice and water sovereignty, and further initiate water charter processes in these communities. The Water Sovereignty activist guide sets out questions for local communities to ask in order to get organised around water issues in their communities, but also to contribute to a water charter.

Earlier in 2018, together with SAFSC activists, COPAC hosted a dialogue with parliament on the water crisis. Members of communities shared their experiences of the drought and solutions, while COPAC presented the two tools (Peoples Food Sovereignty Act and Water Sovereignty Guide) and encouraged engagement from parliament and communities with the tools.

¹ Prepared and finalized (30/09/2018) by Vishwas Satgar (Board Chairperson, Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre), Jane Cherry (COPAC Organiser) and Ferial Adam (COPAC Associate). COPAC is a co-founder of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) and both organisations have initiated the Climate Justice Charter process. A draft of this document was deliberated on at a COPAC workshop (27-28 September, 2018) involving unions, the SAFSC, environmental justice groups, movements and community organisations.

These engagements at local and national levels have not only encouraged local organising around water sovereignty, established or re-ignited links and networks in the water and climate justice movement, giving us a deeper understanding for community water and climate struggles, but they also helped us realise that we urgently need to stimulate national momentum behind a water and climate justice charter process.

The scale of the recent drought and crisis, the impending environmental collapse, and lack of state urgency on the matter has also affirmed to us that we need to continue with our campaigning around water sovereignty, but urgently to scale this up to keep the momentum going. Importantly, we have realised that there is a need for unity amongst climate and water justice organisations, and progressive civil society more generally, to influence the national climate crisis and water debate and outcomes before it is too late. What we do in South Africa can also be shared with movements, activists, community organisations and inter-state institutions in the larger African context.

2. Interconnected crises and deepening inequality

2.1 The climate crisis has arrived. We have to take the science seriously to understand its dangers. The world is now experiencing a 1.2 degree celsius increase in planetary temperature since before the industrial revolution. Carbon concentration in the atmosphere is at over 410 parts per million above the 350 ppm safe level. This is leading to extreme weather events or climate shocks. South Africa's drought is a climate shock and it is not over.

2.2 Serious tipping points are also kicking in like melting glaciers, rapid melting of ice pack in the Arctic and Antarctic releasing dangerous levels of methane, the most deadly greenhouse gas. Sea level rise has also begun. Twenty island states are vulnerable and one has already started evacuation. In this context changes are happening faster, with more uncertainty, and are feeding into the dynamics of run away global warming. Many scientific studies are confirming the suddenness and speed at which climate change impacts are changing the operating boundaries of planet earth.

2.3 Climate shocks are intensifying existing inequalities. More hurricanes, heatwaves, droughts, floods and sea level rise will impact hardest on the lives of the working class and the poor. In a world in which 1 billion people are hungry, income inequality has been worsening and land dispossessions are increasing, the impacts of climate shocks are devastating. Add to this the water crises. More than one third of the world's population presently live in water stressed areas that will be made worse with climate change. We can expect that by 2030, there will only be enough water for 60% of the world's population. Intensification of

inequalities have already been seen in the impacts of hurricanes like in Puerto Rico and in the flood that devastated the state of Kerala in India. In South Africa, one of the most unequal countries in the world in income terms, the rich were able to buy themselves out of the drought with boreholes, buying water and even travelling.

2.4 Climate shocks create new inequalities when food systems collapse (like during our drought) and food prices go up for the working class and poor, or when water restrictions kick in, in a context in which 54% of South Africans do not have a tap and access to clean drinking water. For poor countries climate shocks mean costs for rebuilding. Many countries are already in debt and the costs of climate change are likely to bankrupt them. In this context, climate shocks are also a ‘threat multiplier’ creating conditions for conflicts and social breakdown.

2.5 The convergence of systemic crisis tendencies re-inforce each other. Systemic inequality, climate crisis shocks, water crises, globalised food system crises and the weakening of market democracies are mutually re-inforcing. This creates the conditions for anti-democratic and in some contexts neo-fascist forces to emerge. We need to build societies that have water, food, energy, financial, production, transport and consumption systems that sustain life and ensure deep democracy takes root to withstand the devastating impacts of climate shocks, while mitigating carbon emissions.

3. Crisis of political leadership and making of climate eco-cide

3.1 The response to the climate challenge at a global level has been disastrous. For over 20 years ruling elites and classes have not secured a way forward for human and non-human life. The UN multi-lateral negotiations have been consistently undermined by the US petro imperial state, carbon producing states and corporations. Under Trump the US has eclipsed Saudi Arabia and Russia, to become the leading producer of fossil fuels. Moreover, the Kyoto Protocol and ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ were rejected by the US and its allies. This closed space for countries of the global south to make the case for climate debt to be carried by the industrialised global north. Obama’s pledge and review mechanism, was still-born from the start, with ruling classes in the US not willing to support it. Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement confirms this. The forthcoming COP meetings are not expected to fix a process which is generating false solutions while we are losing time.

3.2 In the world at the moment fossil fuel extraction, including gas, has increased. The global energy mix is still dominated by fossil fuel, according to the International Energy Agency. At the same time, renewable

energy systems, including socially owned ones, are not taking off at the pace and rate we need. A few countries are beginning to show the way. Germany has a commission talking about a date to end coal extraction and develop strategies for coal affected communities, Ireland is debating a new law to ensure they are 100% renewable energy, Uruguay has made the transition to mainly public led renewables, Greenland has geo-thermal and some countries are also using hydropower like Lesotho. Many local governments even in the US are taking the lead in energy sovereignty and democracy transitions. This is not enough.

3.3 Like the global terrain, South Africa is also a carbon addicted society with its ruling class committed to more carbon centric development. Saving Eskom and coal production is their priority even in the new Intergrated Resource Plan's attempted reductions of coal. This also comes with commitments to new coal fired power stations including one for Chinese investors in Limpopo province (a 4.6 GW plant). The minerals-energy complex is also encouraged to expand through the National Development Plan. Fracking and Operation Phakisa are all part of extending the minerals-energy complex both into vulnerable environments including for oil and gas extraction in the 'blue economy'. South Africa's ruling classes are carbon criminals and are not committed to building a renewable energy industry (this is fundamentally different from promoting Independent Power Producers for Renewables that are mainly transnationals), repositioning local government to support socially owned renewables and neither is it providing a way forward for a deep just transition to build new systems to sustain life from below. South Africa has the makings of a failed climate crisis state, at all levels. This is reflected in the inadequate response to the current drought. All our political parties do not have a strong commitment to address the climate crisis, even in their political programs and electoral manifestos. Our ruling classes are failing the workers, the poor and the people more generally.

3.4 Informed by the science, including Oxford Universities carbon tracker (<http://trillionthtonne.org>) we have a very tight and closing window to act to prevent catastrophic climate change. According to their model and attendant assumptions, we have till 2036 before an overshoot of 2 degrees happens. At 2 degrees, at least 17 out of 37 critical tipping points will be breached. The conditions to sustain human life will become extremely challenging, climate change will become more complex and more expensive to deal with. There is an urgency to act now against eco-cide, the undermining of conditions that sustain human and non-human life by a carbon driven, imperial, patriarchal, racialised and financialised capitalist system.

4. Challenges for building a climate justice movement- Beyond Denialism and Catastrophism

4.1 In response to the climate crisis and the failure of global leadership, a climate justice movement has emerged and is in the making. It seeks to build red-green alliances, unite society and advance system change from below for a deep and transformative just transition. This movement has found its voice in the streets outside COP negotiations, in marches recently across Western Europe and in the US, against extractivism, amongst indigenous communities, in droughts, in floods and amongst the ranks of labour championing climate jobs, energy sovereignty and deep just transitions. Building mass working class and popular power is key to this emergent movement to advance democratic systemic reforms to sustain life.

4.2 Today the climate justice movement is also challenged by the need to go beyond opposition in the streets, critique and lobbying. It needs to develop a class and popular project that can advance systemic alternatives that gives power to lead change to the public, confronts the class, race, gendered and ecological impacts of climate shocks, deepens solidarity and gives definition to a deep just transition to sustain life. Many systemic alternatives are emerging to achieve this: food, seed and water sovereignty, energy sovereignty and socially owned renewable energy, clean energy mass public transport, climate jobs, solidarity economies, calls for substantive basic income grants, rights of mother earth, degrowth, life after coal and more. These are working class and popular alternatives. A new local and global left imagination and practice of advancing systemic alternatives for a deep just transition, to sustain life, are emerging from below. We need to unite, we need to listen to the alternatives people have, we need to debate and we need to champion these alternatives in a systematic way to challenge the denialism of business as usual and debilitating impacts of catastrophism; we can't do anything perspectives.

4.3 In South Africa we have amazing organisations in the environmental sector that have a consistent track record of championing environmental justice such as Earthlife, Groundwork and many others. We are also seeing in the new cycle of resistance (2007 till the present) new movements emerging against extractivism like WOMIN and MACUA, against the corporate controlled food system (SAFSC), for rights to information (R2K) and more. Faith based communities are also serious about the climate crisis like SAFCEI. At the same time, unions are all taking the climate crisis more seriously. SAFTU's working class summit was significant in this regard, also a three day conference convened by NALEDI for NACTU, FEDUSA and COSATU on the climate crisis. More unions are beginning to develop policies on the climate crisis. There is now a big debate on the future of coal and ESKOM. NUMSA, for example, is arguing for a socialist approach to the just transition, energy sovereignty, socially owned renewable energy and ESKOM. There is a lot of common ground but we still have to find each other in practice as part of a movement from below. Fragmentation, division and lack of convergence still prevails. The climate crisis threatens everything; we cannot afford not to unite around a common way forward for South Africa. This is the central thrust of the climate justice

charter proposal. We have to stand apart from party loyalties to think in terms of advancing a climate justice approach to nation building that addresses the short comings, lack of seriousness and even lack of awareness of whats at stake. We need a progressive and democratic civil society platform.

5. Towards a Climate Justice charter for South Africa

5.1 South Africa has a tradition of charterist politics. From African Claims, to the Freedom Charter and now our consitution, which is a charter of rights, freedoms, institutions and procedures. However, in more recent times, in the context of climate crisis politics, people driven instruments as expressions of working class and popular power are also gaining a lot of significance. The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (Cochamba Peoples Summit for Climate Justice, 2010), the Leap Manifesto in Canada, Generational Justice principles championed by school children in California to WOMIN's mining charter etc. We need to build on this to confront the biggest challenge we face as a species. As democrats we need to put forward our demands, aspirations and alternatives to build a society that can mitigate and endure climate change.

5.2 The purpose for the climate justice charter and process is to:

- Unite important players in the fragmented civil society, environmental justice and climate justice and water sectors of South Africa, to encourage a re-alignment of climate justice forces.
- Ensure those most affected by climate change and shocks, particularly the working class, the poor, the unemployed and the landless have voice and lead this process of eco-centric transformation
- Develop a progressive, grassroots inspired Climate and Water Charter to:
 - Sustain life
 - Recognise the class, racial, gender and ecological impacts of carbon and climate capitalism
 - Advance generational justice
 - Critique the failed role of political parties in the climate crisis
 - Construct a narrative around climate justice and a transformative just transition
 - Serve as a tool to engage government stakeholders to ensure that climate change is placed on the national agenda.
 - Provide a compass to build pathways from below to achieve systemic change and advance systemic alternatives from below

5.3 Key themes for the Charter to be elaborated in grassroots dialogues relate to systemic alternatives that would bring down carbon emissions and ensure we sustain life as climate shocks hit. These themes include:

- Principles for the charter
- Our conception of the just transition for South Africa taking into account class, race, gender and ecological relations
- Systemic alternatives related to land use, water, energy, food, production, consumption, waste, transport, housing, finance;
- The role of the climate emergency state and our international relations as a climate justice society;
- Communication, education and awareness raising to mobilise society
- The role and form of peoples power from below

We want alternatives, answers, viewpoints, inputs from below related to these themes. South Africa has 18 million children, who need to be centrally engaging in this conversation. Moreover, every sector in civil society (faith, civic, cultural, sport, student, gender, NGO etc.), progressive movement and grassroots community organisation must be invited to input.

5.3 The process will involve the following activities:

Before 2019 elections:

- In communities, in movements and trade unions, workshopping the Water Sovereignty tool, other food sovereignty tools and utilising animations to get input for what should be in the charter. Moreover, utilise the themes identified out of the COPAC workshop of 27-28 September (mentioned above) to also generate input. Record these inputs and communicate these to Jane Cherry copac2@icon.co.za at COPAC;
- Develop and implement a social media strategy to invite public input into the climate justice charter process. This will entail utilising the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign webpage, facebook, twitter and more
- Water, Food and Climate Crisis conference in early 2019, around early February, to bring people together from other constituencies and to develop the draft charter

During 2019 elections:

- Launch of the Climate Justice Charter just before elections at a Peoples Assembly, maybe early April
- Use the elections moment to present the charter to parties through an open letter, public hand overs to local government and more. Write newspaper articles about charter, have local mass events to get community organisations to adopt etc.

After 2019 elections:

- Launch South African Climate Justice Forum and Alliance, convened by COPAC

- Mass action after elections, include deepening adoption of charter by community organisations, workplaces and public institutions (schools, universities etc). Build up a national directory of institutions that have adopted the charter and who support its adoption by parliament. After having a critical mass of organisations having adopted charter and supporting the demand that parliament adopts the charter, take the charter to parliament, for adoption in terms of section 234 of the Constitution, which authorises parliament to adopt charters.
- Develop a tool to assist CJ Charter institutions (those that have adopted it) to translate the Charter into policies and local climate justice plans that can be used to engage local, provincial and national government. Train activists to use the tool and empower grassroots forces to lead from below. All of this will enable us to build mass power to shape any plans government develops to address the climate crisis, whether through the NDP or through the new Climate Change Bill etc.