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CREATING WATER REFORMS IN ADDRESSING WATER SECURITY IN ZAMBIA

The Centre for Environment Justice (CEJ) noted that Water security is one of the key challenges of our time. To put it simply: we, human beings and our ecosystems - the planet - cannot survive without water. And the challenges ahead of us are daunting. Thus, we need to build our capacity to respond to these water security risks appropriately. This means taking action now in order to avoid or at least reduce future risks. CEJ research on water security and water poverty alleviation focuses on how best to address water risks by identifying them, targeting them and managing them. It suggests a radical shift in our approach, one that would prioritise risk management, clearly define acceptable levels of risk, and ensure policy coherence with other environmental objectives and which provides guidance to policy makers on how to improve policies and investment strategies to deal with increasing water risks and uncertainty.

Water security is among CEJ's priority mandate for communities living around and within mining areas for they face risks of water pollution as a result of mining activities. For so long, mining communities have struggled with water pollution and displacements which has resulted into walking long distances in search for clean and safe water. Having said that, and witnessed such community challenges, CEJ understands that achieving water security requires a much broader vision than just ensuring access to water; it requires managing risks. Water security must address the risk of water shortage, of course, but also the risk of water excess (including flood risks), the risk of water pollution, and the risk of crossing critical ecological tipping points that can undermine the resilience of natural water systems, such as rivers, lakes and aquifers.

The cost of these risks to society illustrates their magnitude. Take last year's droughts and floods in Zambia, these events caused huge economic losses. There is also more information on areas at risk of water deficit and on areas vulnerable to water pollution. But more needs to be done. We need to assess how water resources are used and valued. And we need to raise awareness amongst vulnerable populations to ensure that they have the knowledge they need to make informed choices about their own welfare. And we need to help policy makers, businesses and communities understand the scale and significance of the challenge to water security posed by a changing climate.

By 2050, the OECD Environmental Outlook projects that more than 40% of the world population – nearly 4 billion people – will live in river basins under severe water stress (where withdrawals exceed safe levels). By 2050, flood risks are projected to be significantly higher than today, affecting more than 1.6 billion people and economic assets worth some USD 45 trillion. And the

outlook for water quality is also bleak: by 2050 nitrogen effluents from wastewater are projected to grow by 180% globally! At the same time, climate change is reshaping the future for freshwater – increasing water risks and generating greater uncertainty about future conditions.

Water risks are closely interconnected with other policy issues, like food, energy, climate and biodiversity. To tackle these challenges, we need an integrated approach to setting water security targets to ensure that interventions complement one another rather than conflict. Furthermore, managing risks is also about understanding and dealing with policy trade-offs. For instance, increased diversions to prevent water shortages can disrupt water ecosystems. Biofuel production to improve energy security can come at a cost to water security. And agricultural support to enhance food security can lead to overuse of pesticides and fertilisers, and contribute to water pollution.

Increasing water security will create major benefits for human welfare, the economy and the environment. But it will require concerted action on the part of governments to tackle the challenges involved in shifting to a risk-based and holistic approach for water management.

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