

CHAPTER 9

Climate Justice: Can you educate hungry people?

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Justiça Ambiental! (JA!)

In Mozambique, the population is mostly rural and people are highly dependent on rural ecosystems for their livelihoods, so the mismanagement of water resources has huge impacts, not only on rural ecosystems but on the communities that depend on them. Floods and droughts have caused great suffering in Mozambique, so an important priority should be evening out water availability from one season (and year) to the next. There are traditions of rainwater harvesting in some areas of Mozambique, but there is currently no overall strategy for improved rainwater harvesting – despite recent studies showing this could meet the country’s basic water needs.

Mismanagement and misuse of water, resulting from the government’s shortsighted extractive approach to water development, exacerbates social and economic injustices. The priorities of the government have been dam megaprojects, such as the huge Cahora Bassa Dam (built in the early 1970s on the Zambezi River) and the Mphanda Nkuwa Dam (approved by the Mozambican government in 2010, to be built 60 km. downstream and financed by the China Exim Bank).

These dams are for energy exploitation, but most communities surrounding the dams don’t even have access to electricity, which highlights the justice aspects of

these issues. Climate change has also been left out of discussions about dams in Mozambique – the focus is on immediate “progress”.

Justiça Ambiental has been trying over the years to include climate change in discussions on such megaprojects, but for a number of reasons including political resistance, this has been very difficult. The communities living near dams suffer floods and droughts due to the poor management of these dams. The government tries to convince the people to move away from the river, but that is not a viable choice for them because they need the water to sustain themselves (Morrissey 2006).

According to Mozambican meteorologist Alexandre Tique, “the combination of floods and droughts makes many communities particularly vulnerable. In times of drought people move closer to the rivers to farm because the land is more [fertile], and they settle there to be close to their land and crops. But when the floods come they don’t have enough time to head for higher ground. The constant change between a situation of drought to one of flooding means these people are highly exposed” (IRIN 2008:1).

When dam construction (or climate change) displaces entire communities, this causes great problems, because often local leadership structures are ignored and the communities do not have a say about their new location. Different languages and different cultures cause political and economic difficulties for those who are forced to migrate.

Environmental Education

JA! has approached the government several times about introducing environmental education into the public school system curriculum, which the government has agreed is an important priority. But things take very long to be implemented, and NGOs and external associations that try to collaborate with public institutions find it very difficult. Improving public environmental education continues to be one of our goals.

JA! has organized environmental photo exhibitions once a year with amateur and professional photographers, including one called “Water is Life!” in 2010 which invited the public to comment and participate. We have also made a number of environmental presentations in schools. And we have organized community workshops, especially in the area around Mphanda Nkuwa. We have helped to create a civil society association in the Zambezi watershed, the “Vozes do Zambeze” (Voices of the Zambezi), and we are part of the Zambezi River Basin Committee. We have made an illustrated graphic magazine on dam construction, floods in the river valley, what a dam is and the impacts it creates. We have also organized school field trips and environmental workshops on various topics in universities and schools.

Through our grassroots work as well as our participation in international networks and regional alliances in Africa, JA! is attempting to contribute to Mozambican communities’ long-term capacity to face climate change – a principal development challenge.

One question we often have to confront is this: How do you educate hungry people? How can you justify teaching people about the environment, when their

primary concern is day-to-day subsistence? In a recent study, partners in the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA) found that local farmers are well aware of changes in weather patterns and see them as worrisome threats to their subsistence, in combination with other interrelated stresses such as land tenure problems, human and animal diseases, drinking water access, migration pressures, and many other constraints (Arnall 2012).

Climate change, thus, means that environmental education and community organizing are becoming ever more crucial for local people's survival. Civil society organizations can play a key role in facilitating locally-useful, politically-appropriate, and equity-enhancing interventions. The best way to do this is part of a long and very important discussion which is a major concern when people's basic needs are constantly at risk.

[INSERT PHOTOS HERE]