African Diaspora Earthcare Coalition
United Nations Decade for People of African Descent
Quaker Earthcare Witness
The Water Circle 2018 Report

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Introduction

Following the 2017 United Nations High Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development side event, members of the African Diaspora Coalition transitioned the focus of its work from food and agricultural land retention to water—from contaminant-free water access to sea level rise to extreme weather water-related events. Of particular concern are people of African descent who are concentrated in vulnerable coastal regions and flood plains. As with the Food and Agricultural Land Retention focus, a group of partners with specialized expertise were brought together in the Coalition to form the Water Circle. The work of the Water Circle effort includes helping to implement locally developed, interrelated models for contextualized cross-Diaspora sharing around water crisis-induced population displacement; preparing those who are too under-resourced to evacuate flood plains and at severe risk of displacement by extreme weather events in an area from Tampa, Florida, to Atlanta Georgia in cross-Diaspora partnership with Kiambu and Kilifi counties, Kenya; and facilitating water quality testing, community control, and access to contaminant-free water. Throughout the fall of 2017 into fall 2018, Water Circle members undertook a number of activities both in local “Diaspora Where You Are” initiatives and cross-Diaspora model sharing. This included:

- Creating a YouTube Channel, Earthcare Coalition - QEW UN Decade for People of African Descent, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_FPKV2XR4CMGUdqkDEJUVA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_FPKV2XR4CMGUdqkDEJUVA);
- Hosting a webinar prior to mark World Water Day 2018; and,
• Convening a side event on 11 Seventh Month (July) during the 2018 United Nations High Level Political Forum.

Plans are to convene a side event in 2019 and to continue to add content to the YouTube Channel as related to the efforts of the Water Circle, the UN Working Group, and QEW.

Circle Transition and Work Activities 2017 and 2018

The initial work of the Earthcare Coalition included an alternating focus on land retention-food production issues to water with the Land Circle convening a side event at the UN HLPF in 2017. The transition to water issues began in the fall of 2017. The activities to establish the Water Circle included, but were not limited to:

• Creating a database of resource persons and organizations;
• Engaging partners and others to identify concerns, potential impacts, and local models that address concerns and impacts;
• Information and technology sharing; and
• Linking to other Diaspora Circles and beyond.

Resource Persons and Organizations

The database of resource persons and organizations was drawn from local, national, and international contacts identified by members of the Diaspora Coalition, QEW, and subject area experts. A representative sample includes:

• Africa Focused- American Headquartered Organizations
• Alliance for Global Water Adaptation
• Caribbean Permanent Missions
• Columbia Water Center, Earth Institute, Columbia University
• The Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)

Figure 2. Ring Park, Gainesville, FL
• The Water Council, Global Water Center
• Water Security and Climate Change – USAID.

Water Circle Partners

A core group of partners was established that drew from the Earthcare Coalition with the addition of spiritual and subject area experts. The individual representatives of the following partner organizations are listed in the Acknowledgements:

• Black Emergency Managers Association
• Global Sustainable Partnerships (GSP)
• Patuxent River Riverkeepers
• Pwani University, Kenya
• Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
• Support Aid Ministry, Kisumu, Kenya
• Spring of Light (SOL)
• Unitarian Universalists Association UN Office, Black Land Liberation Initiative
• University of South Florida
  o Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering
  o Institute on Black Life.

Through a series of online meetings held in 2017 and 2018, the partners shared information on local concerns and discussed various models that were in use or in development to address concerns or mitigate the impacts. This process has evolved from the work of the QEW United Nations Working Group’s “Diaspora Where You Are.” Examples include:

• The King Tide event, 20 Ninth Month (September) 2017, Shorecrest, Miami (FL);
• The “Water: Connecting People of African Descent” webinar, 21 Third Month (March) 2018; and
• Presentations provided at the 2018 UN HLPF Side Event.

Figure 3. Beverly Ward and John Heimburg collecting data during 20 Ninth Month 2017 King Tide, Miami, FL.
The webinar and the side event were planned as two key activities of the Water Circle. The partners also developed a YouTube channel with goal of creating content for the channel as an education and outreach medium for the Coalition.

Water in the Diaspora and Beyond Webinar
Representatives from five Water Circle partner organizations served as panelists on 21 Third Month 2018 in a webinar to highlight their work and concerns.

- Nancy Abwalaba Owano spoke on Gender Budgeting in the Water Sector, a case study from Kenya;
- Kimberly L. Fogg provided information on GSP’s initiative women in Tanzania using hydriad biosand filters to provide clean and safe drinking water;
- Rabiah Al Nur and Fred Tutman discussed their efforts to conserve, protect and replenish Maryland’s longest and deepest intrastate waterway, the Patuxent River.
- Beverly Ward provided a comparison of two coastal areas, Kilifi, Kenya, and Western Gulf Coast Florida and considerations of sea level rise and extreme events.

The webinar can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2gMJLkZNzM&t=2s.

2018 UN HLPF Side Event, Water in the Diaspora and Beyond
The Water Circle convened a side event on 11 Seventh Month (July) 2018 at the Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission in New York City. Nearly 70 participants, including 40 students and instructors from LaGuardia Community College, attended the side event. The Third Month webinar became somewhat a dress rehearsal for most of the side event presenters. Joseph Akeyo presented on behalf of Nancy Abwalaba. Rabiah Al Nur, Fred Tutman, and Maya Carrasquillo made presentations via Zoom. Maya Carrasquillo, a doctoral candidate in Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of South Florida, gave an engineering perspective on “Water Vulnerability and Climate Justice.” A partial recording of the side event is being edited for posting to the YouTube Channel.

Figure 4. Kirstin Becker, Ward, Akeyo, Antoinette Jackson, and Heimburg, UN HLPF QEW Side Event

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Although the Water Circle was successful in raising funds through crowdfunding, we were unable to have Nancy Abwalaba present in person. The Water Circle is intent on having the remaining funds carryover for the future.

**Water in the Diaspora and Beyond**

There were several milestones that marked the 2017-2018 work of the Water Circle for individuals and organizations. For many in the U.S., particularly in Florida and other Gulf Coast states, we remain vigilant in our efforts to educate and develop models to address water issues, particularly as extreme weather events, e.g., hurricanes severely impact communities of people of African Descent. The local work through SEYM and the Florida Council of Churches, the convener of the FL-iCAN assemblies continues to be a means of identifying issues, partners, and models to address concerns. (Beverly Ward has worked with FL-iCAN since 2016.) During Second Month 2019, FL-iCAN will convene its fifth assembly, “Climate Impact and Environmental Inequity: Towards Justice for All.” An emerging concern is that of climate gentrification. As sea level rise depletes available coastal and other lands, formerly undesirable areas, often settled by people of color or person living in low-income become attractive for development, displacing existing residents.

Another ongoing concern is that of water quality. Asantewaa Harris who attended the 2018 side event had a specific concern that she wanted addressed after receiving a boil water alert from Bloomfield Township. Although this was beyond the capacity of the 2018 side event, water quality is of concern to the Circle and will continue to considered in our education and other activities.

As mentioned earlier, the Earthcare Coalition had intended to alternate between land and water themes throughout the period of the Decade. In 2019, however, the Earthcare Coalition will seek to convene three side events during the UN HLPF. Side Event I will focus on water issues. A more specific theme will be developed by a revived Water Circle. Side Event II will address the theme, “Grow Your Medicine: Traditional Herbal Medicine in Global South Environmental Resilience-building.” And, Side Event III, will address the theme, “We Remember’: Youth of the Yazidi,
Armenian, Somali, and Tibetan Diasporas Speak in Solidarity.” In a meeting of the QEW UN Working Group on 11 Twelfth Month 2018, Friends approved the convening of three side events. The Water Circle will complete an evaluation of the 2018 work and continue to identify issues, partners, and models. Work has begun with the development of a partnership with American Friends Service Committee’s (AFSC) Peace by Piece New Orleans. Vedisia “Dee Dee” Green was interviewed for the Earthcare Coalition YouTube Channel on 28 Eleventh Month (November) 2018. This interview is being edited. Other interviews are planned as part of the education and outreach activities. A budget is being developed and submitted for crowdfunding. It is anticipated that the budget will include funding to support travel for Nancy Abwalaba, at least, to participate in the 2019 Water Circle Side Event.