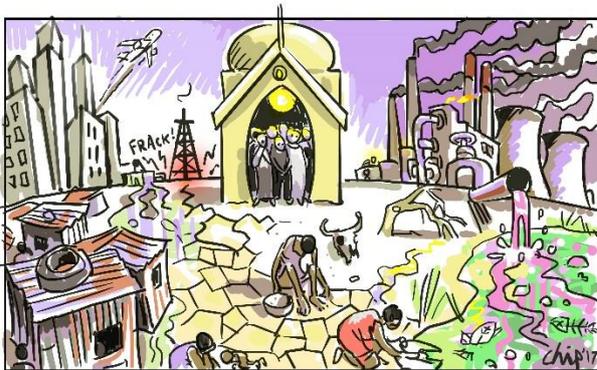**South African communities of faith: a vision for addressing Water Injustice in South Africa**

Water Justice Conference, St George's Cathedral, Cape Town: March 2017

An overview of the final workshop by Dr Kevin Winter, UCT Future Water Institute

We are living in a broken, divided South Africa that is facing multiple issues including water injustice and socio-economic drought that affects human and environmental rights. South Africa is a water scarce country that is even more challenging because of the legacies of Apartheid that remain deeply entrenched in the struggle for a large rural majority in accessing clean, safe water. By contrast, a smaller privileged minority have easier access to high quality potable water and as a result this water is often abused. Access to clean safe water is crucial for human health, productivity, gender equity and quality of living in general, but

water must also be shared in sustaining ecological systems and services. Social and environmental injustices continue to contribute to an unhealthy environment and in the long term this compromises the well-being of current and future generations. It is unacceptable for faith-based communities to be silently watching in the development of the country when their own beliefs and shared value systems are vital and necessary for challenging the current state quo and in re-directing a future that we all want. Faith-based communities cannot be comfortable in accepting injustice that is characterised by

greed, corruption, power and unethical behaviour. After all "what does development mean if it destroys the water and destroys the food?" asks the Anglican Archbishop, Thabo Makgoba.

What can faith-based communities do?

1. Develop a clear understanding of the 'theology' of ecological justice from within each belief system and acknowledge common foundations of other faiths in building a deeper understanding of social and ecological justice.
2. Develop creative, exciting educational material and media that will inform and affirm the values and belief systems that are centred on social and ecological justice. Learn from case studies and experiences that are driven by collective actions in which faith-based communities demonstrate inclusivity and shared values in confronting issues and problems.
3. Identify leaders and champions within faith communities and establish structures that will support these leaders to take responsibility in leading the collective response to social and ecological injustice, and water in particular.

4. Identify ways of inspiring and empowering younger believers in their faith so that they can act boldly to nudge communities towards are more socially and ecologically just, equitable and sustainable world.

5. Find the necessary financial support and capacity to develop programmes that encourage social learning, the lived experiences and exposure to best practice.

6. Use the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a mandate to implement goals that will shape ethical, accountable behaviour within faith-based communities.

7. Strengthen the voice and actions of faith communities in recognising injustices; in supporting advocacy that emphasises justice as a core; in advancing socially-just policy in challenging injustice, inequality and discrimination in all forms; and in establishing ethical and accountable leadership.

Vision for 2030 and beyond

It is essential to protect, preserve and care for water. Once you destroy the natural environment you destroy it forever. Our collective vision is found in the image below where two streams of water flow together in which all citizens enjoy their rightful access to water and where respect for water is sacred and precious. The contribution of faith-based communities to water justice in South Africa will depend on people who are no longer comfortable in accepting injustice, but who are prepared to act for a sustainable, just country for everyone to enjoy both now and in the future.

Streams of water are transformed by communities of faith when values and belief systems inform rightful actions [Artwork credits: Chip Snaddon, 2017]