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CTPD CALLS FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF GROUNDWATER RESOURCES IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Coming from observing the World Water Week that was held from 23rd August to 1st September, 2022 with the theme *“Seeing the Unseen: The Value of Water”* and topics ranging from food security to the climate crisis, Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD) is calling on the relevant authorities to prioritize and enhance sustainable management of groundwater resources. In recent years, CTPD has observed the mushrooming of bore drilling companies springing up to serve the purpose of easy access to water, and it can be attributed to the expansion of socio-economic activities and mushrooming of new settlements especially in urban areas. And many other factors are attributed to this trend but population increase as well as climate change have necessitated this trend, and the need for safe drinking water and improved sanitation go with these changes.

As we may be aware, groundwater is the main source for domestic use, irrigation and industrial activities in many countries, Zambia included. The Stockholm International Water (SIWI) Institute and UN World Water Development report that groundwater amounts approximately to 99% of unfrozen fresh water on earth, and about 25% of all water withdrawn is for irrigation. In addition, about 2.5 billion of the world’s population depend on groundwater as their only source of water. SIWI report further indicate that groundwater contributes to about half of the global food production. It is an essential component of the hydrological cycle and critical to sustaining many sensitive aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

Further, groundwater is one of the most abundant fresh water resources and plays a critical role in the regulation of drought and flood situations. The regulatory role of groundwater is a marvel. It just shows how nature plays an integral role for the sustenance of all beings. During drought periods, groundwater comes to the rescue of many communities especially rural communities by replenishing the river systems through seeping. On one hand, it is said to act like a “sponge”, it sucks the water during abundant periods and releases it during dry periods. This is an important role that can help adapt to the current climate crisis being

experienced globally. The fight against poverty, food and water security, the creation of good jobs, socio-economic growth, and the climate change resilience of society and economies all depend on groundwater.

CTPD has observed that groundwater use will become more and more important, mostly due to rising water demand across all industries and changing rainfall patterns. This observation arise from the report by Water Resources Management Authority (WARMA) on the total applications for groundwater permits indicate that about 75% are coming from provinces affected by unpredictable rainfall patterns i.e. Central, Lusaka, Southern and Western. This clearly shows the water and food insecurity the nation is facing now and going forward emanating from the climate crisis. Aside from climate change impacts, it can be attributed to population increase and expansion of socio-economic development activities such as manufacturing and agriculture leading to intensive abstraction of groundwater, and posing a high risk of exposure to pollution from such activities. In that regard, the main threat to groundwater is pollution coming from the use of chemicals in the agriculture sector, manufacturing industries and urban settlement. The use of toilet cleaning materials in areas without proper sewer systems like areas of Chalala and Kanyama will have an adverse impact on their health overtime. Although agriculture sector has high pollution potential to groundwater, only about 5% of area is equipped for groundwater use for irrigation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Groundwater pollution is a virtually irreversible process: once polluted, aquifer zones tend to remain with polluted water.

In order to enhance sustainable management of groundwater resources, it is vital that necessary strategies are taken by the relevant authorities to understand groundwater resources for proper management. CTPD recommends the following strategies that can be undertaken:

- Research and development of groundwater resources in the country especially in urban areas.
- Enforcement of the laws especially around aquifer zones such as forests and wetlands should be amplified.
- Efforts should be enhanced towards monitoring the quality of groundwater.
- Robust awareness campaigns of the impact of pollution on groundwater and its impact on health.

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The Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD) is a not-for-profit, membership based trade policy and development think tank. The organization was established in 1999 and existed as the civil society trade network (CSTNZ), until 2009 when it was rebranded as the Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD).

The mandate of CTPD is to influence pro-poor trade and investment reforms at national, regional and multilateral levels as well as facilitate the participation of various stakeholders including member organizations in ensuring that trade is used as a tool for poverty eradication.

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