

Defending rural communities' right to water: 2018 case study from Angola

Context: conflict over water

In April 2017 the provincial government of Huila province announced plans to appropriate a community water source for a government project to deliver water supplies for pastoralists and private farms.

The area is a semi-arid zone which experiences frequent droughts. Government officials, including the provincial governor himself, were among the landowners set to benefit from the scheme.

Fourteen communities in the parish of Missão de Santo Antonio, comprising 600 families, depend on this spring for drinking water, irrigation and livestock. They were not consulted over the plans. With support from Christian Aid's partner CGN – the Chiange Gambos Network¹ – the community challenged the provincial government, whose actions violated several laws.

Local advocacy and negotiations continued through 2017, but with little progress. CGN therefore supported the community to scale up their advocacy, resistance and visibility work in 2018. Working through three existing community groups (women farmers, cattle herders and young people), CGN's mobilization and capacity-building work laid the foundation for what happened next.

Action and impact in 2018

In **January 2018**, the community took [direct action](#), blocking the road to the spring with rocks and branches, so that landowners' lorries could not reach it.



Community roadblock, Missão de Santo Antonio, January 2018

CGN provided logistical support and worked to raise visibility of the community's efforts, in order to both ensure their protection and to maximise impact. The story featured in numerous news outlets, including those of our partner Radio Ecclesia.

CGN made contact with other national and international allies, adding considerable weight to the community's media, advocacy and litigation efforts. Our partners AJPD and SOS Habitat provided specialist legal and advocacy support.

CGN also sought to involve high profile church officials. In **February 2018**, the

Catholic Archbishop of Lubango and the President of SECAM² visited the community, and the Archbishop subsequently made representations to the provincial government on their behalf.

In **March 2018**, the provincial government [announced that it would stop taking water from the spring](#), and would investigate alternative water sources for their project.

In **November 2018**, Father Jacinto Pio Wakussanga from CGN, the priest and activist who spearheaded the community's resistance, [was named Human Rights Defender of the Year](#) by the Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network.

¹ CGN is made up of local three grassroots organisations: ACC (the Association for Building Communities), the Ovitumbi Association (representing local cattle herders) and PROMAICA (the Promotion of Women in the Catholic Church).

² Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar