The Politics of Water: A Southern African Example

Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa Research Paper 20

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Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa: Institutions, Governance and Policy Processes

Through work in southern Africa this research programme has explored the challenges of institutional, organisational and policy reform around land, water and wild resources. The case study sites have been in Zambezia Province, Mozambique, the Eastern Cape Wild Coast in South Africa and the lowveld area of southeastern Zimbabwe. Three broad themes have been explored:

- How do poor people gain access to and control over land, water and wild resources and through what institutional mechanisms?
- How do emerging institutional arrangements in the context of decentralisation affect poor people's access to land, water and wild resources? What institutional overlaps, complementarities and conflicts enable or limit access? What new governance arrangements are required to encourage a livelihoods approach?
- How do the livelihood concerns and contexts of poor people get represented in policy processes concerning land, water and wild resources in local, national and international arenas? What are the challenges for participation in the policy process?

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Summary

During the 1990s southern African countries led water policy developments through a 'new regionalism', spurred by drought. However, they encountered difficulty in implementing new reforms. This report examines political contradictions in reform processes across regional, national and local levels, drawing on research in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. It shows how implementing distant concepts involves complex local political negotiation. It questions how easily 'good resource governance' can be devolved within complex, changing socio-political environments. Shifting property rights regimes—including donor-related macro-economic adjustment—generated new political classes and state-society actors, involving new understandings and meanings of resources and ownership. Key issues arising are: local generatation and retention of revenues, links between local knowledge and decision making, 'grey areas' of non-commercial use beyond domestic levels, and challenges and competition over formal and informal systems of authority. Access to natural resources has to be a starting point for policy-makers and planners not simply in sectoral institutions but in those that serve some form of 'cross-cutting' role, for instance local district councils and municipalities.

Introduction

During the 1990s southern African countries were at the forefront of new policy development in the water sector. The much-lauded southern African Water Law of 1998, regarded by observers as one of the most progressive world wide, received large-scale attention. Less scrutinised, but nonetheless significant in breaking with decades of tradition and embedded rights discourse, were the respective water laws passed in Mozambique (1991) and Zimbabwe (1998). The decade's end witnessed a further scaling up of change and political commitment to the sector with the Abuja Ministerial Declaration on Water which both underscored commitment to the sector with the NEPAD initiative, and also set up a new institutional structure—the African Ministerial Conference on Water (AMCOW)—tasked with halting and reversing the water crisis and sanitation problems in Africa (Salman 2002). Water resources in southern Africa have been at the heart of a 'new regionalism' around which action on shared water resources has been fundamental, spurred on by the experience of severe drought in the 1990s (Chenje and Johnson 1996).

This high-level political endorsement and new institutional initiative re-emphasised a signal feature of the water sector in Africa: its strength in providing a convenient unifying feature for political action at a continental or regional level, but the great difficulty in practice involved in implementing new reforms and initiatives. This disjunction between the political importance attached at the level policy, but the frequent lack of political commitment at the level of implementation is the main feature of this paper. What this reveals is a problem that crosscuts the donor-government environment and appears to become more and more serious the greater the stated problem is at hand.

This report examines some of these political contradictions embedded in reform processes and across regional, national and local divides. To do this, it draws on research undertaken particularly in Zimbabwe, but also in South Africa and Mozambique. It shows how the implementation of ideas often borrowed from extremely different contexts involves complex local political negotiation, perhaps beyond that involved in reaching agreement between national level institutions, or even southern African governments. The notion that 'good governance' of the resource can somehow be devolved easily and efficiently within complex, changing socio-political environments, a concept increasingly promoted by donors in the region, needs examination. At best the idea is overly optimistic, at worst misleading and showing a tendency to view complex issues of livelihoods management in terms of sectoral institutional development.

Southern Africa is home to one of the most complex local political environments on the continent. At a most basic level, the huge shift in the nature and possession of power resources—a form of political 'glasnost'—has changed the relationship of millions of individuals to institutions of governance. A precursor to this has been in the case of South Africa and Mozambique in the 1990s and, earlier, Zimbabwe in the late 1970s, years of violence and displacement from land and exclusion from access to key natural resources. This shift has borne new political classes, and emergent sets of state-society actors—which are now in the process of being drawn into the new management institutions at a local level.[1]

These new actors and new constellations of interests around local natural resources have brought with them new understandings and meanings of resources and ownership with respect to individual and collective livelihood strategies (or perhaps, meanings have re-emerged in the case of ideas and meanings long subsumed under oppressive government). This new policy landscape includes new structures and forms of state-society relations of enormous relevance to, and impact on, access to

[1] The use of 'drawn in' is used to employ that not all participation is voluntary and requested; people may feel compelled to become a part of new institutions when they represent (or appear to at least) now channels of access to resources long denied them.

resources by poor people. With the political change there has been parallel economic change, linked closely to donor policy on macro-economic adjustment. In many cases there have been significant shifts in economic policy with macro-scale impacts, sometimes in tandem with wider economic impacts caused by drought in the region (Marquette 1997; Benson and Clay 1998).

The policy environment has necessarily been radical, reflecting the 'sea change' in society and the relationships of the majority population to their natural resource environments. In short, policy has had to address fundamentals of ownership rights, restitution and empowerment within the terms of democratic decentralisation (see for South Africa, for example, Abrams 1996; Kihato and Schmitz 2002). A central feature of this concern has been the need to address basic rights to resource access and the huge poverty affecting much of the black population in the region (Turton and Henwood 2002). And central to this concern has been the notion that water is essential to wider social, economic and political development in countries of the region (see Muller 2001).

Regional resource perceptions

At the level of resource management, broad perceptions of the regional resource context have also played a significant part in the emergence and implementation of new policies. The main influence has been concerns about scarcity and the overall 'securitization' of the water resource context in southern Africa[2]. The language of scarcity and water security remains central to sectoral narratives in the region, much of which stems from the seminal experience of the 1991/92 drought in southern Africa. The perceived urgency of the situation permeates current writings (see, for example, Swain and Stalgren 2000; Chiuta 2000; and Zhou 2000).

The drivers of water policy reform that have emerged globally have been examined in an earlier phase of the SLSA work (Nicol 2002; see also Derman and Ferguson 2000). Key areas of influence of these 'global narratives' on water development range from the issue of resource 'securitisation' under perceptions of scarcity, to the bundle of ideas embedded within 'integrated water resources management' (IWRM), such as 'user pays' and' 'stakeholder decision making'. The latter IWRM approach in particular has become a powerful narrative in the construction of the new water policies in southern Africa, as reflected, for instance, in the subtitle of Zimbabwe's Water Resources Management Strategy—'Towards Integrated Water Resources Management' (Government of Zimbabwe 2001)—and in Mozambique's Water Policy,

[2] The evidence for long-term climate change and significant impacts in southern Africa is growing. Rainfall records in the region shows that rainfall data in the early 1990s was some 20% lower than that recorded in the 1970s; and the 1991-92 season was the second driest on record after the 1921-22 season (Hulme 1996, quoted in Chenje and Johnson 1996).

where it is stated that rational allocation requires an integrated management approach. The securitisation of water (Ohlsson 1995; Tevera and Moyo 2000; Buzan et al. 1998) has also had a major impact on supply structure development in the region particularly in South Africa (Turton and Henwood 2002), but also, to a lesser extent, in Zimbabwe (Zinyama 1995).

The influence of donors—acting as lightning rods for conducting global narratives into national policies—has been significant. Regional networks supported by bilateral and multilateral donors including the Global Water Partnership's regional Technical Advisory Committee[3] have played a key role; and some bilaterals have also actively promoted the concept of IWRM, including GTZ[4] through its piloting of an international IWRM network in southern Africa. Southern Africa was chosen precisely because of a perceived 'broad acceptance' by regional actors of the IWRM concept. Yet such concepts are created in politically benign or neutral environments and often are supported by little knowledge of their capacity to function within more politically contentious environments. In southern Africa, though, there are no easy IWRM solutions (for a useful discussion of this in the Zimbabwean context, see Manzungu et al. 1999).

What is significant from the policy and political analysis perspective is not that these perceptions are necessarily right or wrong, but how, in spite of their proven validity, they are significant in determining actions (and donor and national government sectoral budgets) in the region. These narratives of scarcity and security[5] have become closely associated with the discourse on improved resource management, itself a sub-set of wider narratives on democratic decentralisation (though not necessarily linked institutionally at a local level). Frequently the problems associated with perceptions of scarcity and the means to address heightening tension over managing resources are seen as linked, viz: '…the sharing of the waters of the Zambezi Basin is shrouded in tensions and conflicts at various levels. The constraints inhibiting the effective management of the shared water resources of the Zambezi basin include lack of a basin wide IWRM framework…' (Chiuta 2000: 151). And in the case of Zimbabwe in 1992, for example, severe drought 'underscored the need for a sustainable water resources management strategy that would be responsive to such an extreme event' (GOZ 2001: 8).

[3] The Global Water Partnership's policy influencing products also include documents such as the 'Framework for Action document' (Global Water Partnership 2000a); TAC Background Paper No 4 on Integrated Water Resources Management (Global Water Partnership 2000b) and the IWRM toolbox (Global Water Partnership 2001).

[4] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Society for Technical Co-operation).

[5] It should be noted that flooding too is a major concern in southern Africa and comes under the notion of 'water security'; for instance the floods in February/March 2000 in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique were some of the worst for decades, heavy rain and Cyclone Eline causing the Limpopo and Zambezi to expand to a width of 80 Miles (Salman 2002).

There are therefore two major trends behind current policy reform in southern Africa: the rights-based, 'democratic change' environment, and the natural resource 'developmental constraint' environment. The interface between these two environments is particularly acute in the water resources sector because of the inherent variability in the resource itself (as opposed, in particular, to the relatively stable absolute availability of land). The 'messy' nature of this interrelationship results from the wider political or 'governance' changes, the pre-eminent example of which in the 1990s has been the shift to 'decentralisation' of government. Put crudely, therefore, vertical sectoral policy questions with specific resource orientations cut through have not yet necessarily successfully engaged with broader lateral changes to the whole state-society relationship. This dislocation has a number of emerging consequences for poor people's access to resources such as water. In particular the 'political histories' attached to reforms—perhaps invisibly so—really count at the local level and impede or assist their progress to successful implementation, let alone impact on the poor.

Drawing particularly on detailed case study work from southeastern Zimbabwe, this paper identifies and examines three key areas in water reform processes:

1) The process of institution-building that accompanies policy reform and the impact of establishing new structures in complex and contested political environments (both formal and informal), leading to sometimes perverse anticipated and unanticipated outcomes.

2) The different meanings attached to water by different stakeholders and the implications of these contested meanings being brought into new decision-making processes under such new institutional structures.

3) The 'grey area' in much policy development that allows water used productively, but at the domestic level, either to be excluded from decision-making in policy arenas or to be misunderstood in terms of its links to poverty reduction and the behaviour of new local institutions (included in which is the often neglected area of livestock use and access to water as a key part of the household asset structure and a major coping mechanism in times of drought (see Kinsey et al. 1998)). Crucially, this causes ambiguities in difficult policy areas, such as cost recovery and the raising of revenues through water charging.[8]

[8] The difficulties of reconciling attempts towards cost recovery with safeguarding peoples rights to water is further key theme that is dealt with in *SLSA Research Paper* 17.

The next four sections firstly examine in broad outline the major policy context to water reforms in southern Africa; secondly examine the three themes above in some detail with respect to the case study work and; finally, draw some conclusions as to possible policy development and implementation options that could address some of these critical issues.

Policy change in southern Africa

Mozambique

Mozambique has been in the news more for excesses of water than for droughts in the last decade. A classic 'downstream state', more than half of Mozambique is located in international river basins, even though the country itself represents just 20% of the total area of these basins. Over half the country's surface water arrives as inflow at the border and, a half again of that amount is concentrated in one river basin only, the Zambezi (Tauacale 2002).

Mozambique's water sector shifted from being a highly centralised, colonially designed system to a more decentralised system by the early 1990s. Until 1991 Mozambique's water laws followed Portuguese colonial law (influential long after independence in 1974). The 1991 Water Law brought all water within the state ambit, and as a public good (Leestemaker undated). Nevertheless, simultaneously (and with a degree of donor influence) the Water Law opened up the sector to private firms, autonomous utilities and water users associations. As a result an ambitious new institutional environment was mapped out.

One of the more significant aspects of the Law was its distinction between 'common' and private usage of water; the first subject to fee collection, the latter not. This distinction had important policy implications for livelihoods usage and highlighted the ambiguities within the notion of 'private' use at a household level (there being clear 'grey areas' in meanings attached to commercial livelihoods activities and those that are strictly for household consumption only. These ambiguities remain).

Following the Law, in 1995 a new National Water Policy established a set of principles for supply management that made 'basic needs' a priority and ensured water was free for subsistence use (but, again, without defining what such needs and uses explicitly were—i.e. whether they went above and beyond 'survival level' usage and a very basic minimum per capita amount). The policy also enshrined the notion of beneficiary participation and the dual concept of water's social and economic value. In common with nearly all emerging water policies at the time, the National Water policy brought in the principle of management at the

most appropriate level, removed riparian rights and instituted a system of water permits and concessions.

Much of this policy shift represented an alignment with emerging global narratives on water resource management, particularly those promoted by major lending institutions (for instance, as set out in documents produced by the World Bank (e.g. World Bank 1993)). Perhaps unsurprising in their influence, given the 'opening up' of Mozambique's economy at this time, nevertheless donor encouragement helped to bring in rapidly a new institutional environment, including important new institutions such as the National Water Council (1991), with a policy remit, an implementing arm—the National Water Directorate—and *Adminitraceos Regional de Agues* (ARAs), or decentralised river basin institutions. The latter were public institutions tasked with basin-level development planning, water usage regulation and user fee collection, reflecting a common thread of decentralisation in resource management across southern Africa, at the time.

In water supply delivery, Mozambique has one of the lowest proportions of populations having access to safe drinking water, compared to other countries in Southern Africa. Data in Mozambique also indicate a declining trend in the proportion of people having access to safe drinking water. This is illustrated by the fact that 85 percent of the urban population were reported to having access to safe drinking water in 1997 compared to only 29 percent in 1999 (WHO/UNICEF 2001). On the other hand, a similar trend was observed for rural areas, where the proportions of people having access to safe drinking water declined from 37 percent in 1997 to 36 percent in 1999. It is vital to note that there are differences in data observed for the same period by different sources in Mozambique. With particular reference to South Africa, an interpolation of data indicate that 35 percent of the rural population in 1998 (Webster 1999) and over 95 percent of the urban population have access to adequate water supply[9].

In contrast to both Mozambique and South Africa, approximately 84 percent of Zimbabwe's population in 1988 had access to safe drinking water. The proportion of the population in Zimbabwe who had access to safe drinking water rose to 89 percent by 1999 (WHO/UNICEF 2001:6). With particular reference to rural and urban differentials, the proportion of rural people in Zimbabwe who had access to safe drinking water rose

[9] Data on proportion of the population having access to safe drinking water for both Mozambique and South Africa is limited. For the period 1980 to 2000, the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation Coverage Programme (2001) reported, for South Africa, that there was either insufficient information or data to come up with the figures for access to safe water supply and sanitation. However, the website http://www.grida.no/aeo/24.htmprovided some useful estimate for urban population in South Africa. For Mozambique, in 1997, the Demographic Health Survey indicated that 85% of the urban population had access to improved drinking water source and the Census reported 78% for the same period. For rural population, the DHS reported 37% while the Census noted 46%.

from 68 percent in 1988 to 77 percent in 1999. On the other hand, virtually all urban dwellers had access to safe drinking water from 1988 onwards. The proportion of urban population in Zimbabwe who had access to safe drinking water was 99 percent in 1988, 100 percent in 1994, 1997 and 1999 (ibid.).

Important to note is that, Mozambique's drive to improve access to safe drinking water to her population has been hampered by the legacy of civil war and an uncoordinated approach at a central level. By the mid-1990s this had caused very low levels of provision of new services, either reticulated or point source in nature. In 1997 the new Rural Water Transition Plan increased the level of technical expertise in the provinces and led to the establishment of a national community-level approach. This re-emphasis on localised approaches nevertheless was pegged on the local development of expertise, including a local private sector of entrepreneurs, and also local community level capacity to fund operation and maintenance costs. To some extent the co-ordination and coherence of service delivery improved. However, local capacity to undertake community-based approaches remains low and actual data on coverage and demand is often scant or unavailable. Wider debates about the efficacy of seeking 'full cost recovery' and the subcontracting provision to private operators in peri-urban areas has raised a host of questions about the commitments laid out in national documents to the provision of basic needs and the 'free' subsistence use of water commitment. In effect whilst the resource itself may be a free good, if the costs and gaining and maintaining access continue to be devolved, then it may remain a good with a considerable price tag attached for poor communities. This is exacerbated by the fact that 'the legal framework for water supply is still incomplete since regulations for several areas of the Water Law remain undeveloped' (Nhantumbo et al. 2001: 27).

South Africa

South Africa has been at the forefront of both rights restitution and democratic change, and the need to manage an increasingly constrained natural resource environment over the last 15 years. In the post-apartheid era overcoming a lack of services in neglected townships and rural areas has required huge investment in infrastructure development. This political imperative was due to the combination of political demands from the black majority and the appalling legacy of neglect which apartheid development had left behind. Water had been a skewed sector in which the interests of industry, mining and white commercial farming far outweighed basic needs development for the black poor—in fact independent 'homelands' set up under Apartheid were largely excluded altogether from the development process under Apartheid (Abrams 1996). The result was a population of up to 14 million in 1994 without formal water supplies, half of which had no formal sanitation.

The new policy and institutional processes set in train with the election of a black majority government included the promulgation of a National Water Policy (1997), a Water Services Act (1997) and, finally, the National Water Act (1998). New institutional roles and responsibilities, including new catchment management agencies (CMAs) that would meet demand for the resources, were created and public participation became new watchwords in resource management. This represented an embodiment of the concepts of IWRM within complex local and national political environments and, given the Apartheid past, represented something of a sectoral revolution. The new concepts of 'strategic reserve' with which to meet environmental sustainability objectives and the guaranteeing of basic human needs were enshrined in the new Act. Decentralised management would be to the catchment level—similar to the Zimbabwean design—and it was envisaged that management charges would cover the actual costs of activities. But significantly, the rolling out of these reforms has been affected by local-level complexity in determining who should be represented on the new structures and how, in practice, they can become self-financing. The environment that placed greater priorities on the inclusion of new and emerging local-level stakeholders has had to contend with the relative inertia of the local environment in many cases, to actual changes on the ground.

Reflecting changes in priorities and the political necessity to translate political enfranchisement into economic development for the black majority, the 1994 paper on Community Water Supply and Sanitation signalled an important shift to needs-based service delivery at a local level. At the same time, however, it also sought the introduction of concepts of financial sustainability based on demand-responsive delivery. These schemes, called 'Build, Operate, Train and Transfer' (BOTT), were themselves regarded as the best way of speeding up the service delivery to the poor, whilst also addressing wider global policy designs. However, they had various assumptions embedded in them, including community capacity to provide for 100% cost recovery, and municipal government ability to take on the management of new services after a given period.

The combination of local-level political expectation, new design features and their own lack of technical expertise in this areas placed considerable demands on some municipal governments. In most cases this local-level of government was only in an emergent form, leading to some severe criticism and concerns that they were not effective means by which to establish long-term, sustainable approaches to community supply. Nevertheless, right up until the late 1990s the BOTT schemes were regarded as the way forward, bringing public and private delivery together with local, community-based management (Nicol 2002). Since the new decade, the political environment has shifted back towards service delivery based on the supply of services in order to provide for a basic minimum level of water, in recognition of the fact that South Africa is the only country to constitutionally acknowledge the human right to water. However, as Mehta and Ntshona (forthcoming) show, South Africa's rights-based approaches to water are often hindered by parallel

attempts to recover costs which are in keeping with international donor discourses. Moreover, several institutional and political factors hinder the implementation of its free and basic water policy. They include problems with cross-subsidisation in rural areas, a lack of clarity of the duties and responsibilities of various implementing agencies and the poor capacity of municipal governments to implement the policy.

Zimbabwe

At the time of writing, Zimbabwe's period of reform and political renaissance is largely a distant memory. In parallel with South Africa, in the late 1990s there was a rash of redevelopment and restructuring in the water sector as the country embarked on an ambitious new development path. New institutional reforms followed new water acts, and, as distinct from South Africa, the process of implementing these reforms had been a somewhat more straightforward affair. But by the end of the decade although progressing a considerable way, it got bogged down in the emergence of political conflict at the level of state-society.

The significance of the reforms was never in doubt. As the Water Resources Strategy for Zimbabwe stated,

> *Zimbabwe is emerging from a situation where water resources development was intended to benefit only a selected section of the community. The laws of yore were designed to lend credibility to such an approach. The challenge now is that Zimbabwe should ensure that all its citizens have equitable access to water through the implementation of policies to promote this objective. Equitable access to water must also be defined in terms of productive use. It would not be prudent to set aside an allocation or even grant an allocation to an individual or group for that matter if the water will not be used beneficially.* (5)

This commitment neatly encapsulated the issue facing Zimbabwe's water sector 'redesign', namely the achievement of more equitable access for the poor black majority, but with the proviso that reallocations had to provide for greater productive use. These were words constructed prior to the new language of political confrontation over land, but had added resonance with the land issue after the 'land return' question became central to local institutional development and the democratic decentralisation agenda from 2000 onwards.

Key features of the new water reforms were increased stakeholder participation—both in terms of political 'enfranchisement' over resource management (in an implicit sense) and the concept of lower-level user-baser decision making—and in the 'broadening of the funding base' through greater fee collection and private investment. Historical problems included formerly skewed development towards benefiting a few urban dwellers and the agricultural sector and the lack of effort put into developing water for rural areas where the majority lived. Although from 1976 there had been introduced River Boards and advisory

councils, these allowed for only the limited participation of stakeholders. In fact, voting rights were exclusive to water right holders, the great majority of whom were commercial, predominantly white, farmers.

Under the new 1998 Water Act the establishment of Catchment and sub-catchment councils sought to broaden stakeholder participation. The Act came into force in January 2000 and paved the way for a new system of decentralised water management institutions, not only shifting the institutional environment towards concepts of integrated water resources management (IWRM), but also fundamentally altering the basis on which water was apportioned, managed and paid for. Under the old system, rights to water were granted according to the 1976 Water Act. This gave earlier applicants right of access to the resource in times of shortages. This directly prejudiced later applications even though later applicants might well have faced similar problems. This 'priority date' system was a major stumbling block to equitable access and became a change priority (WRMS 1998: 7).

A further contentious issue included the fact that rights were not time-bound but were granted 'in perpetuity', which could mean catchments became 'fully righted', effectively excluding new users from the resource. This potential for development 'stasis' clearly challenged other concerns within the development reform process, including land reform; at a minimum, access to water would be important to new and emerging farmer success. As the Water Resources Strategy states, the concept of right in time, although intended to facilitate the allocation and access to water resources in the event of a water shortage, 'in practice…seriously prejudiced those with a later priority date'. Further, the document noted that the use of the term 'water right' suggested the right was immutable, although in practice they could be cancelled or suspended by the Minister concerned. The concept of 'private water' was also poorly understood, particularly at the boundary between surface and groundwater. Whilst the Act defined private water as: 'all water, other than public water and underground water, which a) rises naturally on any land or b) drains or falls naturally on any land; so long as it remains on the surface of the land and does not visibly join a public stream …', most people regarded borehole water as private (WRMS 1998: 19-20). The Water Act hoped to bring all water into the state domain thereby increasing the volume of the resource for which charging could be introduced. At the time of writing in parts of south-eastern Zimbabwe an audit of all water points—large and small—was being undertaken at a sub-catchment level with a view to bringing in charging for all such sources being used 'commercially'.

The creation of catchment and sub-catchment councils (CCs and SCCs) under the Act brought in a new decentralised management system with lower-level responsibility for issuing permits and creating an effective user-management interface. The fee collection role was of critical importance to the new Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), a parastatal funded exclusively through their collection at the sub-catchment level. This emphasis on the commercial viability of institutions

reflected donor policy development globally. The Water Resources Strategy anticipated that ZINWA would 'operate along commercial lines, generating its own resources for operation and maintenance of infrastructure and contracting commercial loans for capital development in its own right' (Government of Zimbabwe 2001). As will be shown below, the presumptions about user willingness and ability to respond to the new charging system may in fact have been wide of the mark.

The changing environment in water supply delivery also reflected wider policy shifts, although there was a more muted response to the development of demand-responsive approaches, such as those initially employed in South Africa. Nevertheless, water supply delivery in Zimbabwe was as important a political issue post Independence and extended basic service delivery through provision of boreholes became a key government objective in the first decade post Independence.

During the1990s—and particularly as structural adjustment squeezed government budgets—there was an increasing emphasis on cost recovery and the devolving of responsibility to cost recovery through community-based management. The experience of the 1991/92 drought in many ways hindered the development of such approaches, however, as some 20% of all boreholes in communal areas and 44% of deep wells dried up (GOZ 2001: 32). Much of the subsequent response to the drought focused more closely on emergency measures.

In common with both South Africa and Mozambique, however, the emergence of broader policy on 'democratic decentralisation', in the case of Zimbabwe through decentralisation to Rural District Councils, ensured great complexity in the transition from centralised service delivery through line ministries to decentralised, community-based delivery under the RDCs. The complex interrelationships between these processes remain important features of the current policy reform process in the region.

In Zimbabwe, as in neighbouring countries, the political landscape is, to some extent, being shaped by the relationships between these reform processes. New types of political expression are emerging at a local level, mediated through the new management institutions and their interrelationship to local councils and municipalities (and the political actors therein). The ways in which demands for basic services are articulated are increasingly a function of the relations between new sector-specific management institutions and broader governance structures at a local level.

The next section examines the key thematic issues emerging from the research which resonate regionally and are likely to remain central to the success—or not—of sectoral reform processes improving poverty

Key thematic issues

Institutions can change—the roles people play may not

Institutional change within the reform process has been significant. It has created an institutional 'melee' that has contributed to some confusion over roles and responsibilities particularly given changes to the types of task undertaken by managers and local political actors. The parallel changes to resource management and broader democratic governance have been, in part, responsible; but so have the expectations about new stakeholder involvement being a smooth and relatively straightforward process of inclusion at a local level. In many instances this has not been the case.

Institutional complexity

Research in Chiredzi district in Zimbabwe has shown how responsibility for provision of new water supply services has been diffused between a number of sometimes competing institutions, which include government departments and non-governmental organisations. In some communal areas, combined with the overall shift from central government to decentralised, local-authority-based provision, a scramble for responsibilities and control by different institutional actors has resulted. This reflects both the political nature of resource development in the relationships between institutions and society, and the inter-institutional competition for control over budgets and processes that is part and parcel of decentralising governance environments. One of the key reasons for the political nature of resource development was noted by an informant in south-eastern Zimbabwe who stated that:

> *While in the past the office of the District Administrator [DA] was happy to control water provision and development in a district as drought stricken as Chiredzi, one should not fail to see the political interest in that. Through the office of the DA, central government, which is synonymous with the ruling party, may provide water to wards and villages that voted for the ruling party. In this light, one may unwillingly hand over responsibilities for water development to the next office. The office of the DA may still want to maintain a co-ordinating role for political ends.*[10]

In decentralising governance contexts, where local 'demands' are channelled to political actors (usually councillors or similar) clear tensions can therefore develop between electoral representative politics and the institutional politics of the executive. The process of decentralisation is rarely, therefore, free of political dispute and, at worst, dysfunctionality.

[10] Interview with a Chiredzi District Council Official, 8 October 2001.

In other cases institutional complexity works within the water 'sector', broadly speaking and relates to the 'type' of water that users are accessing. The question is complicated for irrigators in lowveld Zimbabwe, depending on whether they are using river water—in which case they need to access the sub-catchment council—or dam water , known as 'agreement water'—in which case they need to go directly to the newly-established ZINWA office. A lack of awareness can prompt users without the relevant knowledge to waste considerable amounts of time in trying to resolve their water management issues. Far from reducing transaction costs and improving resource-use efficiency—from the user perspective—confused processes of decentralisation can actually increase transactions costs and, by extension, reduce income-earning opportunities for farmers. The chairperson of a sub-catchment council in the lowveld stated:

> *The truth is that people in Lower Save sub-catchment do not know what is going on with regard to water reforms. First, they still consult their respective rural district councils about water issues. Secondly, they do not know the difference between ZINWA and sub-catchment councils—they think it's one and the same thing.*[11]

In many cases encountered during the research in Zimbabwe, this confusion of understanding was manifest in unwillingness to change practices and/or a tendency to ignore the environment of institutional change. For this reason the processes of 'outreach' were given prominence by catchment councils, but the actual capacity to undertake these activities was severely limited by personnel shortages and transport difficulties. As noted in the WRMS (1998: 5) itself,

> *The devolution of water management to the lowest appropriate levels will not materialize unless the catchment and sub-catchment councils are strengthened and supported at this initial stage. Catchment and sub-catchment councils need training and other forms of material support if they are to fulfil the objectives for which they have been set up*.

Institutional complexity also arises when the remit and mandate of difference governance processes (but both of which have key livelihoods importance for farmers and other resource users) overlap of are dislocated. This difficulty has been compounded by the broader decentralisation process.[12] For example, whilst responsibility for district-level development lies with the RDCs, catchment and sub-catchment councils as well as the Zimbabwe National Water Authority and its local level offices, are decentralised institutions in their own right with a mandate to manage water in respective catchment boundaries. Two areas of confusion arise: firstly, hydrological boundaries often cut across several rural district council areas making participation in the catchment

[11] Interview with a Councillor, Sangwe Communal Area, 27 July 2002.

[12] For a useful early discussion of some of the water reform processes and decentralisation, see Derman et al. (2000). For a broader critique of the decentralisation approach in Zimbabwe, see Makumbe (1998).

councils problematic (who has the greatest stake? Who can attend meetings?); secondly, the water management mandate of the SCCs and CCs brings in important development decision-making—including who and what should receive new permits for water use. This is a fairly common difficulty across the respective case study countries. It suggests a need for more flexible boundary demarcation and the capacity to change according to problems and needs as they arise. In the case of the Save Catchment there is some evidence that institutional responses to this problem are taking place, with realignment of sub-catchment council boundaries to make the 'fit' with RDC more accurate. This is illustrated by the recent expansion of Budzi sub-catchment to include a substantial part of the Lower Save sub-catchment, that is the eastern bank of Save River, which falls under Chipinge Rural District Council. Similarly, the Lower Save Sub-catchment council offices which were previously in Chipinge District, were transferred to Buhera district which is closer to the majority of the stakeholders of Lower Save sub-catchment.

Where there is a poor 'fit' institutionally, the loser is inevitably the end user, frequently poorer farmers and water users who are less informed, further from administrative towns such as Chipinge and Chiredzi, and less able to articulate their needs. The decentralisation process created villages, wards and RDCs which became the official focal administrative points. Given their political role, too, they also naturally become the focus for complaints and disagreements over resource use. Confusion on 'where to go' with water issues was outlined by the Chief Executive Officer of Chimanimani Rural District Council:

> *People are not aware of where to go with their water queries … naturally most people come to the rural district council because it is their local authority … We constantly tell people that water issues in some parts of Chimanimani—from the Skyline Junction, town area, Rusitu, Ndima and the surrounding areas—report to Budzi sub-catchment council which is in Chipinge district. The other parts, Nyanyadzi and Cashel areas report to different sub-catchment councils. You see, it's complicated.*[13]

This institutional division makes both reporting and participation problematic. Some areas of these catchment areas might be important hydrologically—for instance in terms of upstream catchment—but remote logistically and therefore difficult to elicit participation from.

Added to this, is the lack of or incomplete administrative and legal framework that set the parameters for institutions in water management. Thus government and non-governmental organisations that have an interest in the management of water in Mozambique establish its own water management committees from community to provincial level, and indeed national level. This tendency was aptly captured by an old man in Mozambique who stated that there is a 'disease of committees'. In short, the existence of incomplete water legislation coupled by a multiplicity of

[13] Interview with CEO, Chimanimani RDC, 19 February 2002.

water related committees adversely impact on the participation of stakeholders, particularly poor rural people, in water management.

Participation

From increasing information and communication within catchments the new institutions were also tasked with increasing dialogue between stakeholders, with the objective of arriving at a 'shared vision' in the form of catchment development plans. Participation would necessarily be a vital part of any such 'visioning' process leading to actions on the ground (again, very much an echo of broader donor strategies in the water sector). Whilst 'genuine dialogue' among stakeholders and between stakeholders and the policy makers was sought, there were also recognised problems inherent in bringing stakeholders together: 'Meetings have the disadvantage that the number of people who can attend is restricted. The experience in the two pilot projects showed that if adequate resources are not allocated, stakeholders fail to attend meetings resulting in adverse impacts on programs' (GOZ 2001: 73). This problem of non-attendance at crucial parts of the 'process' of dialogue and decision-making was explicit in the case study areas in Zimbabwe.

As well as the institutionally complex environments, there has also been growing complexity in the roles and functions of participants within many of the new institutions. The nature of participation has changed substantially and the expectations of the types of participation has brought with it competing demands and challenges. In some cases the outcomes appear to stack the benefits of participation against 'new stakeholders' (read poor communal farmers), particularly when high transaction costs are taken into account. One local chief who participated in a new catchment management process in Zimbabwe outlined his experience:

> *At first we were not given any money for bus fare. We went to attend the meetings when we have our own business to do in town. We pushed for transport allowances, and then we were recently given Z$500. … This money is not even adequate for transport, so what about food? Do I have to travel from my home to starve in the name of a sub-catchment council meeting? No! … This is the main reason why people from Chimanimani, particularly myself, do not attend these meetings.* (quoted in Mtisi and Nicol 2003a: 40)

Whilst prosaic in tone, the quote above reveals a startlingly simple, but fundamental problem, with reform processes and associated institutional change. Inclusiveness comes at a cost and where greater inclusiveness is sought, the additional costs will have to be born by participants, unless institutions are themselves capable of financing these costs. Where the financing of such institutions is based on user payments, participants will effectively be either cross-subsiding themselves or be cross-subsidised by those they represent (assuming the system is representational). The

governance challenge of balancing participation costs with payments for services delivered is a key one.

The new politics of inclusiveness—at least as stated formally—has encouraged participation at the grassroots in water management. Yet for much of the twentieth century in southern Africa, and particularly in countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, the legal and administrative frameworks governing ownership, access, control and use of water favoured elite and often racially defined interests, notably commercial farming and mining. Communal populations in countries such as Zimbabwe were legally denied access to, and use of, water for secondary purposes, such as irrigation (for example, through the Water Act of 1976 which tied together land and water rights through the legalisation of riparian rights).

New forms of participation therefore must confront such historical legacies in all countries of the region. In some instances, there will need to be greater subsidisation of participation in order to achieve the new ideal of broad-based stakeholder involvement. In others, the careful balance in types of authority sufficient to develop genuinely functional decision-making institutions. A key challenge, given the skewed access typifying past arrangements, includes responding to the relative roles and powers of informal as opposed to formal systems of authority.

Whilst the assigned roles under new legislation and institutional structures might suggest an orderly picture of responsibility and overall co-ordination, the reality is that roles are flexible and their nature and success in practice depends greatly on the individuals who assume them. In the recent political turbulence in Zimbabwe the wider roles expected of traditional leaders have sometimes led to conflict with formal systems of authority if, in practice, their 'authority' does not match external expectations (see Chaumba et al. 2003). Thus, in some areas, *sabhuku* (village headmen) who are not politically connected to the ruling party have been sidelined in the process of local-level resource development. Water committee members call for meetings instead of the *sabhuku*, and rule enforcement is undertaken by caretakers and councillors. Whilst their valuable role in community mobilisation may be stated in policy, this may be compromised by political allegiances elsewhere. One such situation was revealed by a *sabhuku* who was contesting the authority of the ruling party in the new political arena:

> *I have been campaigning for a different candidate for ZANU (PF) primary elections with the Councillor. It has been like that for many years. …Unfortunately, the candidate that I have been rallying behind continually lost to the Councillor's candidate. Since it has been viewed as a crime, I have been excluded in all those issues. The Councillor says to the people, 'it's me who sourced [money] for the boreholes', so they work with him more closely than myself. I have nothing to do with it.* (quoted in Mtisi and Nicol 2003b: 15)

In many ways the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders will reflect the political environments from which they came. The 'politicisation' of resource management institutions is a virtual given—particularly in contested resource environments—and in Zimbabwe has been evident in the catchment management processes. However, this is not to suggest that more 'politicised' institutions are less capable of serving the interests of their 'representatives'. In fact much democratic decentralisation discourse encourages the emergences of locally-competitive political environments, of which resources management institutions are a fundamental part.

This does, however, underlie the complexity of power and authority relationships emerging in southern Africa over access to resources. Whilst the concern to build in the involvement of civil society as part of locally-based resource management is frequently expressed by donor institutions, in practice there are questions of power and authority involved. In South Africa, for instance, there is a problem of municipalities being suspicious of CBM/NGOs, with the latter regarded as potentially undermining of councillor authority.[14]

Institutional transience

Given the design, implementation and management costs alone of institutions of resource management, there is a strong imperative to ensure their longevity. Nevertheless, case study research indicated that at lower levels, in particular, there was a problem of institutional transience. The image often portrayed externally is that of permanent institutional 'solutions' to development 'problems', particularly in local-level resource management, of which community management is seen as a long-term solution. Yet, in some cases, this may in fact be merely only a transient solution and one that is used instrumentally by the communities themselves.

An example from Zimbabwe has shown how local-level institutions may even be victims of their own success. A communal well and garden project in Chiredzi district worked well for three years before people started to realize their profits. With increasing individual profit the incentive for collective action diminished, and many instead began to sink their own wells and establish gardens at their respective homes. This led to a state of project 'dormancy' with nominal members of the original committee simply staying on in case they could capture future rewards from the original source of project financing (Mtisi and Nicol 2003b).

Meanings and resistance

As policy narratives shift so do the meanings attributed to water and its use. But these may not chime with local understandings of water and its

[14] Interview with head of large water sector NGO in South Africa, April 2001.

place in rural livelihoods. An interesting example is provided by the Save Catchment Council Outline Plan for 2002. Illustrative too, of the breadth of ambition involved in the CCs development vision it seeks to, inter alia, promote growth by providing for 'industrial expansion, agricultural development, hydropower generation, promoting tourism and fisheries', as well as 'promoting poverty alleviation by bringing poor communal people into productive irrigated farming to ensure food self-sufficiency and employment generation', and 'environmental management by ensuring high water quality standards through pollution control, preserving ecosystems and promoting good land'. At the same time is sought 'water use efficiency' and 'equity in accessing water through appropriate pricing to ensure that the less affluent are afforded access to water while promoting development programmes in traditionally marginalized areas' (Save Catchment Council/ZINWA Oultine Plan, January 2002).

Embedded in the above statements are a number of meanings about the process of water management from an institutional perspective and resources as a capital 'asset' for poor farmers. The contestation of meanings involved often results in confusion for the very water users the reforms were supposed to assist. And whilst the reforms themselves call for greater information and communication with farmers, in many ways the flow is one-way. One farmer from Zimbabwe observed:

> *We as Chinyaduma Farmers' Coop don't know what is happening at Budzi [Sub-Catchment Council], …we are forced to pay for water …we don't know why we are paying … we want to use water in Chako Dam to irrigate our tea but we don't know what to do to get the water. I'm told that we should apply to Budzi, that's why I came here [Budzi SCC offices] to be get an explanation …We are not refusing to pay because there is nothing for free these days, but what we want to know is why we are paying and how can one small-scale farmer get involved.*[15]

In this case the lack of understanding of the water reforms was not a trigger for resistance, rather for bewilderment about what should be done. However, in other cases significant resistance is generated. Across the region, as global narratives on water as an economic good—which came to prominence from the mid-1990s onwards—have filtered into policy-making they increasingly come up against local narratives on the cultural and social meanings attached to water resources. This can not only stymie the work of the new institutions themselves, but also create difficulties (and faultlines) between users at a local level. An episode form the minutes of one sub-catchment council meeting within the Save Catchment is illustrative:

> *Mr Thodhlana obtained his final right in July 1998 to abstract from the river, but after putting in the necessary equipment some community members denied him abstraction claiming cultural rituals on that abstraction point hates diesel smell,*

[15] Interview with official, Budzi Sub Catchment Council Offices, 2 April 2002.

sound of engine, etc. So community members dismantled the installed taps/broke pipes and eventually forcefully stopped the right holder from abstracting. Appeal made to the DA's office, ZRP and chief but no furtherance. Right holder paid ZINWA account but appealed for assistance in overcoming obstacles to project.[16]

The water reforms in Zimbabwe are a case in point where the concept of water with costs attached to its delivery (even if it seemingly flows naturally towards the user) grates against ideas of community and communal resources based on local meanings, beliefs and concerns. In Budzi sub-catchment which covers Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts, most inhabitants are ethnically Ndau. For the Ndau, water is a 'God-given' natural resource, just as the land is in which it is found. Meanings attached to water, sources of water and how it is used are far removed from economists' concerns with cost recovery, or even notions of water as a social good that brings physical goods to people. Similarly to land, water forms a central element in Ndau worship, but is viewed as more than the physical form in which it is found. It attains a religious dimension and becomes that natural resource 'the people receive when ancestral spirits are approached to intercede for a successful rainy season' and which 'ancestral spirits make available in certain rivers and springs even in the event of the mother of all droughts'.[17] Thus the custodian of water is the chief and his people, and the ultimate owners are the ancestral spirits. The corollary is that traditional leaders and communal farmers have access to water because it belongs to them and their ancestors, which posits a conception of ownership often at odds with outsider views of how the resource is perceived locally (cf. Moriarty and Lovell 1998: 18). Access to water is therefore gained (and governed) by acceptance as a member of the spiritual community, and willingness to respect the ancestral spirits of an area. Access to water through traditional institutions and associated narratives also gives water a transcendental quality that links the livelihoods and religious aspects of communal area people (Mtisi and Nicol 2003a). Whilst this might be deemed unimportant when it comes to guaranteeing availability of the resource, it is vitally important when considering resource access, and the rules and sanctions involved in managing communal institutions.

The meanings of the resource are therefore as confused—in terms of imported notions of what water 'is'—as are the meanings of community as commonly received by intervening agencies (see Blench 1998). The neat, territorial definition falls down under this more complex notion of belonging and membership. This has important implications for water management across the region. The politics involved in such cases are as much about definition of community as it is the relationships between communities themselves. In the Sangwe communal area in Zimbabwe, for example, the term 'community' and its extension 'community water point' is variously defined and interpreted, and each definition and

[16] Budzi Sub Catchment Council Outreach Program (minutes 29/01/02).
[17] Interview with Chief Dzingire, 2 April 2002.

interpretation is associated with a unique set of rules governing access to water.

The traditional notion of 'community' denotes a group of people who live in the same geographical area, share a common history, cultural heritage, and fall under the same chieftainship. In addition, these groups of people share common interests and control of natural resources. People in Ward 1, for example, are commonly referred to as, *vanhu vekwa Gudo*, meaning all the people who fall under the jurisdiction and chieftainship of Chief Gudo and to whom access to local natural resources is open. With respect to water, members of the Gudo community have unfettered access to natural springs provided that certain customary rules are complied with—breaching these rules is believed to cause springs to dry up.

However, new approaches to water point management have challenged this traditional system, not least by assuming new meanings for 'community'. Community in this case refers to a group of people sharing a water and sanitation facility.[18] Thus, a borehole drilled in Musindo village becomes a Musindo community borehole—access to the water is limited to people residing in the village itself. Further, with community based management, access may further be limited to people who have contributed water point fees. Community-based management introduced new definitions defined by proximity to the water points and ability to pay whilst discarding traditional notions characterised by the commonalities of history, culture, tradition, chieftainship and ancestral spirits. The result has been that Gudo members may 'flout' new rules governing access on the basis that they have a right to fetch water wherever it is was found because 'water is for everyone'. Research found that the extension of the traditional notion of community from natural springs to boreholes resulted in many villagers not contributing to water point fees, and fetching water at any borehole they wished (Mtisi and Nicol 2003b). This articulation of established ownership concepts with new sources of access is often overlooked in the rolling out of programmes based on imported notions of how community management should be undertaken. It is little wonder, therefore, that institutional transience is a feature of much of the rural water supply development in southern Africa.

Changing availability of water also has the effect of shifting community 'boundaries', as traditionally depicted. The community becomes defined by the extent of its water point 'users'. When a community water point is functioning, the 'catchment community' of a water point may expand, but if it is malfunctioning and there is need to contribute financially towards the maintenance and repairing of the borehole, the community contracts. The boundaries of communal responsibility and 'ownership'

[18] Community Based Management of Water Supply and Sanitation Facilities in Zimbabwe: Implementation Guide. The National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme, National Action Committee, July 1999:8.

may be inversely proportional to the availability (and cost) of water. Consequently, borehole maintenance is a major issue at the local level. Often, at a regional level, the concept of instilling a 'sense of ownership' is repeated by agencies—and in particular NGOs—over and over again. This concept of ownership appears rooted in a preconceived idea of what an 'owner' looks like and how he or she behaves, which is fixed across time and space. Added to this is the practical difficulty of implementation. In some parts of Sangwe the longer-term process of building ownership and community capacity to manage even in favourable community circumstances was frequently reported to be hurried and piecemeal. Many respondents criticised the training as a 'one-off' event with no follow-up and refresher courses. In some cases, too, the trainers were more interested in future work in maintaining the pumps than in actually transferring skills to communities (ibid.).

Similarly in South Africa, a legacy of government provision and control has rendered attempts at community-level management problematic. As Zolile Ntshona and Edward Lahiff observed in relation to Mdudwa village in the former Transkei:

> *The critical issue facing water schemes in the Eastern Cape is their maintenance. Many schemes have not been implemented but few are operating as intended, mainly due to poor maintenance. This, in turn, is widely attributed to the general lack of a sense of ownership among users, with the schemes being widely viewed as government property. People in Mdudwa are still waiting for 'the government' to come; and make their scheme function properly and unless this happens it appears unlikely that the standpipes will ever operate as intended* (quoted in Ntshona and Lahiff 2003: 27).

At the catchment level, too, meanings and their attachment to resources are similarly a contested area. The process by which the new narrative on water as an economic good has become established within reform processes has been particularly controversial. In Zimbabwe the abruptness of 'learning' about the new reforms and ways of understanding the resource-user relationships was occasionally vividly demonstrated: 'I came to know of Budzi SCC when I saw a young man on a motorcycle who had come with a receipt for water charges … which I knew nothing about'[19] was how one small-scale farmer explained the new situation. Another stated that, 'last year the levy was Z$200 and this year it is Z$2,000. I don't know how it was raised and why? But whether I know it or I don't, I have to pay' (Mtisi and Nicol 2003a: 27).[20] Resistance to the new system was also put forward in some cases: 'Why pay for water and whose water is it anyway? … If you can show and prove to me that the water I am drinking is ZINWA water I will pay … This is our water from time immemorial.'[21] The combination of dissociation from the new institutions and the import of new meanings

[19] Interview, Gwenzi, March 2002.
[20] Interview, Mundanda, 16 February 2002.
[21] Interview, Ndima Communal Area, 3 April 2002

about a fundamental resource has the capacity to scupper successful implementation of reforms or, at best, ensure that heavy-handed sanction will be the only way to ensure their success. If the latter is the case, this could well have repercussions for stakeholder participation.

The roles played by 'new stakeholders' in all countries were in flux during the period of the research. In Zimbabwe this was particularly acute, due to the land resettlement process. In some instances the narratives of access to land, so strongly pushed by the war veterans lobby, have been extended to water. The Chairperson of the Zimbabwe National Wealth Recovery Matsiyo Project, an association of 105 newly resettled farmers at Wolfscrag farm, stated, for example, that: 'we do not want to steal this dam from him [a commercial farmer], but to share with him the water, just as we are sharing the farm. There is enough water in the dam for all of us'.[22] Thus, there are perhaps the beginnings of an articulated vision for water and livelihoods among new settlers, with many now recognising that gaining access to land is only one part of the wider struggle for livelihoods.

At a broader regional level, the land reform process will have major resource management and allocation implications across countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa. New categories of users with specific resource access needs are already emerging, particularly as government—and donors—remain keen to promote small-scale irrigation as a plank of broader poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods strategies. The linkage between water use and livelihoods is likely to become increasingly important—and a major challenge for new resource management institutions.

Water is first and foremost a livelihood resource—management should reflect this fact

The two previous sections have helped to illustrate some of the complexity that new reforms in the water sector are both generating and meeting in rural areas in southern Africa, focusing specifically on Zimbabwe. However, there is a further factor in the reform process that may prove of great significance in terms of future poverty reduction impact. This is the apparent 'grey area' between what is understood in regional policy documents and institutions as a basic, domestic or 'primary supply' and what is additional to this level and deemed commercial usage to be paid for at cost.

The WRMS notes the lack of integrated water and land management in the country (and this is prior to the recent land return crisis), and the need to 'create an enabling environment for an integrated approach to land and water resources planning and management on a catchment basis'. At the same time it notes the failure to recognise water as an economic good, the resulting poor 'tariff structures and insufficient cost

[22] Interview with Chairman and First Secretary of Zimbabwe National Wealth Recovery, Matsiyo Project, 1 April 2002.

recovery measures' (WRMS 2000). As Derman and Ferguson (2000) have argued elsewhere, however, deep disagreements between different economic actors about the price and quality of water are expected:

> *Both white large-scale farmers and small-scale black farmers are opposed to paying for water and seek to keep its price low; in the first case because they want to keep costs low in competitive global economy and in the second case because they cannot afford to pay much for water.*

The significance of this 'grey area' is in understanding the role of water in household livelihoods and the impact charging for given quantities may have on these livelihoods. Increasingly there is a recognition that insufficient account has been made of household livelihood uses, ranging from livestock production to small household gardens and cottage industry, within water sector reform processes; and specifically the lack of commitment to ensuring that this domestic 'plus' level of water is available, reliable and affordable.[23]

The residual influence of large-scale farming is understandably evident in many of the new 'integrated water management institutions'. Systems developed to allow bottom-up revenue collection largely depend on these large-scale farmers being charged for water supply in order to generate significant revenue streams at fairly low relative administrative cost. Charging many smaller farmers smaller amounts provides for a far greater institutional headache. Now that the land reform programme has brought about the comprehensive dismemberment of many large-scale commercial farms in Zimbabwe the nature of the institutional-user interface has changed substantially in many areas.

Previously in Budzi sub-catchment, for instance, nearly all commercial farmers have (or had) water rights on rivers that flowed through their farms. Of the more than 500 water rights in Budzi sub-catchment, more than 90% belonged to predominantly white commercial farmers. Many commercial farmers viewed the access and use of water by communal farmers, particularly newly-resettled farmers, as leading to 'massive land degradation, siltation and disappearance of rivers'. To this end, the major concern of commercial farmers, Budzi and Lower Save sub-catchment councils and indeed the Save Catchment Council, was with the establishment of conservation measures in upstream catchments (Mtisi and Nicol 2003a). The establishment of effective service delivery and water resources development that benefited emerging small-scale farmers has been largely off the agenda of many institutions.

Yet the linkage between water and household livelihoods is crucial in order for the new water users and participants in the institutions truly to be stakeholders in management processes. At present there is largely

[23] See, for example, the Natural Resources Institute co-ordinated Water, Households and Rural Livelihoods project working papers (http://www.nri.org/WSS-IWRM/reports.htm).

tokenistic and partial participation for a variety of reasons, including the opportunity and transaction costs involved in participation. It should be no surprise that the process is inherently politicised. In Sangwe communal area, for example, the provision of boreholes has been a 'reward' for supporters of the local MP and councillors.

Understanding the limits to participation and payment are therefore crucial in assessing the likely impact of water sector reforms on rural livelihoods. There are fine thresholds in household income that determine ability or inability to contribute towards repairs and maintenance. In contexts of extreme livelihood vulnerability—with increasing unemployment, intermittent and declining remittance income, and the burden of HIV/AIDS—the longer-term planning and management of financing is extremely difficult, making cost-recovery a major implementation challenge.

Conclusions

The drive to reform water policy in Zimbabwe, specifically, and in southern Africa, more generally, has been bound up with a variety of goals, the influence of global ideological current and associated donor policies and strategies. These are based around global narratives on managing water under conditions of scarcity perceived, frequently, in no better way than per capita water availability. There have also been positivist approaches based on notions of good resource government, more efficient management structures and the creation of viable community management and financing mechanisms. Yet these have largely been sector-centric goals and strategies, and ones that overlay and are in turn overlain by other non-sectoral processes, such as broader political agendas and global economic change. The environment in which reforms are implemented is complex at every level, and the resulting anticipated and unanticipated outcomes frequently do not confirm to initial reform objectives.

Within this environment the institutional development required to establish viable structures and decision-making processes will have to adjust to political realities at a local level, but also seek to engage with these realities through creating greater linkage to the broader governance reforms taking place. This means connecting resource governance institutions more effectively to processes of establishing and precipitating local demands for resources, through institutions of local government, including district councils and municipalities.

This kind of political connectivity is likely to strengthen the resource management process and certainly create a basis for challenging some of the more entrenched resource-based interests at the local level. In the case of water supply, as well as water resource development processes, this entails empowering of local authorities within the catchment

management process through increasing their role—and stake—in the water management process. It is also a process that speaks to those increasing numbers of sectoral specialists who see non sector-specific solutions to water sector problems. In brief, that the challenge of scarcity and adapting to changing availability is not necessarily simply a challenge of managing demand and/or augmenting supplies through, say, more dam building. Rather it can involve broader sectoral shifts in the pattern of demand, shifting water use in and out of sectors and looking beyond agricultural incomes as a mainstay of local and national development.

Nevertheless, whilst new reform institutions do emerge and take on sector-specific tasks, one key issue is the linkage of locally generated revenues, to local development of the resource. This localisation of the loop between stakeholder involvement, user fee payment, and local institutions is vital to successful decentralised management, but is often absent. There is a serious danger that the process of charging for water remains an extractive exercise in moving money from the periphery to the centre. Better local 'loop-building' could also serve the secondary purpose of using broader resource management revenues to cross-subsidise water supply developments for more deprived areas within districts. At a more fundamental level, increasing this interrelationship could also help to facilitate links between local knowledge—including the indigenous and competing narratives of meanings of the resource—and decision making and resource development processes at higher levels.

The second major challenge is to create the means within these new institutional structures to understand the 'grey areas' of water for broader livelihoods uses and, at a minimum, to bring some clarity to the issues of payments for water usage that are non-commercial, yet go beyond the basic 'primary' or domestic level usage. Bringing greater local knowledge into decision-making, as well as increasing the linkage between decision-making in new institutions and the demands placed on local political actors, can help to encourage new stakeholders and decision-makers to make more informed choices on how to implement policy and, indeed, how to feedback to a national level the strengths or weaknesses in policy impact.

At a broader level, these shifts would help to increase the feedback loop to national policy-makers and to encourage more flexible and dynamic policy processes that were inherently more responsive to demand, on the one hand, and able to establish levels and types of impact on the other, including benefits to poverty reduction through facilitation more sustainable livelihoods.

However, one major outstanding issue, particularly at the local level, will remain the challenges and competition over formal and informal systems of authority. Frequently the modernizing tendency of 'new policy' seeks to challenge traditional authority, often characterised as backward and obstructive of change. By contrast, accepting the importance of different types of authority and combining these systems of authority in new

institutions, may precipitate greater coherence in decision-making or, at the very least, help in addressing local community and household-level issues to policy makers. At present there is evidence of considerable local level politicking over resource access and management which, in the long term, may serve to disenfranchise rural people and hinder resource development processes.

Moreover, access to natural resources has to be a starting point for policy-makers and planners not simply in sectoral institutions but in those that serve some form of 'cross-cutting' role, for instance local district councils and municipalities. An awareness of water and livelihoods linkages can help to establish potential synergies between institutions at a local level, so that the actions of local councillors in facilitating demands, of local traditional elders in articulating demands from communities, and local key stakeholders themselves in these institutions, can be framed in a language of water availability, access and usage that both accords with and responds to rural household livelihoods. Increasingly in the region, this will involve articulation between demands for access to land, and access to water resources.

The real challenge is largely a political one, and at all levels. Whilst the political rhetoric that accompanies initiatives and efforts at better resource management regionally helps in an instrumental sense to build collective action, the translation to lower levels is a far more political awkward and challenging process.

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