

The political nature of water resources management: insights from Bulawayo and the Mzingwane Catchment Area, Zimbabwe.

C. C. Mabiza ^{a *}, P. Van der Zaag ^a, E. Manzungu ^b and R. Ahlers^a

^a UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education, Delft, The Netherlands

^b Dept. of Soil Science and Agricultural Engineering, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

Corresponding author; e-mail: collin.mabiza@yahoo.com; c.mabiza@unesco-ihe.org

Water resources management is inherently a political process. Politics determines who gets what, and to an extent, how. While many studies have decried the pace at which the reforms in the water sector have been translated into action, most researches have not factored in the role of politics in pushing or dragging the reform agenda. Years into the reforms, it is becoming evident that these reforms have not been accompanied by the selective application of political power and as a result have had mixed results. Overall, the reforms have not had the same political support and muscle as reforms in other sectors have. In Zimbabwe, for instance, in just about 5 years the ‘fast track’ land reform process which began at the turn of the millennium, backed by a strong political muscle, changed the whole landscape, literally. In close to a decade water reforms have not benefited from the same vigour, and consequently the sector does not have much to show for the passage of time. To date ‘water redistribution programme’ is still to take off the ground in most rural areas, and the majority of the rural households still lack access to water for basic needs. However, of late the Zimbabwean government has exerted its political power in trying to wrestle the management of water from urban authorities, and has had mixed results. The objective of this paper is to make use of the insights from the land reform process in Zimbabwe to develop better understanding of the political nature of water resources management. The paper makes use of the recent government directive that ZINWA take over the management of urban water supply as a case. The paper concludes that the progress, or lack thereof, in the implementation of the reforms in the water sector reflects the lack of political will by both the government and the society to push forward the agenda of the reforms.

Key words: water resources management; institutions; politics; power; Bulawayo

Target theme: Water and society