4. Politics and Water Policy:

A Southern Africa Example

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1 Introduction

Access to and management of water resources is inherently political. Drawing on fieldwork from the Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa programme, largely undertaken in Zimbabwe, with some additional material from South Africa and Mozambique, this article examines the politics surrounding water resources and policy change in southern Africa and reaches some tentative conclusions of relevance to understanding current policy processes in regional water sector reform.

At the regional level, southern Africa has experienced rapid upheaval and socio-political change in the last 15 years. With the end of apartheid in South Africa, the post-independence political developments in Zimbabwe and the post-civil war situation in Mozambique, fundamental political and economic shifts have been made at ideological, institutional and policy levels. There is a new "regionalism" in which water resources feature very prominently (Chenje and Johnson 1996). This new political landscape includes new structures and forms of state–society relations of enormous relevance to and impact on access to resources by poor people. In many cases, there have also been significant shifts in economic policy with macro-scale impacts, sometimes in tandem with wider economic impacts caused by drought in the region (see articles 1 and 2 of this *Bulletin*; Marquette 1997; Benson and Clay 1998).

Reflecting this political "sea change", much policy change has addressed fundamentals, in terms of ownership rights, restitution and the nature of historical oppression of particular groups, and the wider issue of the political enfranchisement and empowerment of the individual as a political actor (for South Africa, see for example, Abrams 1996; Kihato and Schmitz 2002). Central to much of this change has been a concern to address the poverty affecting much of the regional population of 200 million (Turton and Henwood 2002); in many senses water reforms have been seen as essential to wider social and political development in countries of the region (Muller 2001). Not surprisingly, as policies with these fundamentals embedded within them have begun to translate into action at the scale of local and national institution-building, important contestations of formal and informal political power have emerged, both in terms of

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how to access resources under new sets of institutional arrangements and how to begin to control the new sets of institutional arrangements for long-term social and economic gain.

Such processes are virtually inevitable in any major environment of policy change. But in southern Africa, they have perhaps added weight given the political histories of oppression and denial of access to natural resources (Moyo 1991). Part of this linkage to local historical and political processes has been in the "messy" nature of policy and institutional change: reforms specific to natural resource environments have run in parallel to wider political or "governance" reforms (or changes, at least), the pre-eminent example of which in the 1990s has been the shift to "decentralisation" of government (see article 7, this *Bulletin*). Put crudely, 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 articulation has had a number of impacts and has emerging consequences for poor people's access to resources such as water.

The political histories attached to particular resources have therefore been of great importance in terms of this articulation with broader governance reform. Efforts at improving access to water by the poor and marginalised, largely black, populations in southern Africa have not just been tied to global concerns about poverty reduction, but also to region-specific contexts of class, power and race. Few of the current reform processes address such issues head on and instead are embedded in discourses on water management appropriated from global narratives and policy goals. Yet it is the "political histories" attached to reforms, perhaps invisibly so, that really count at the local level and impede or assist their progress to successful implementation, let alone impact on the poor. As this article illustrates, it is the specifics of political issues that play a key part in determining the end result at a local level of national policy reform and implementation.

The drivers of water policy reform that have emerged globally have been examined in an earlier phase of the SLSA work (Nicol 2003, 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, 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[1] have played a key role; and some bilaterals have also actively promoted the concept of IWRM, including GTZ[2] 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 IWRM easy solutions (for a useful discussion of this in the Zimbabwean context, see Manzungu *et al.* 1999)

Drawing particularly on detailed case study work from southeastern Zimbabwe, this article 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 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 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 institutions at a local level (including, critically, the importance of livestock use and access to water as a key part of the household asset structure and as major coping mechanisms in times of drought (see Kinsey *et al.* 1998)). This also brings ambiguities to difficult policy areas, such as cost recovery and the raising of revenues through water charging.[3]

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

2 Policy change in southern Africa

2.1 Mozambique

Mozambique's water sector shifted from a highly centralised to a more decentralised system during the 1990s. The Water Law (1991) opened up the sector to private firms, autonomous utilities and water users associations and launched much of the subsequent institutional change One of the more significant aspects of the Law was its distinction between "common" and private usage of water; the one subject to fee collection, the other not. Following the Law, in 1995 the National Water Policy established a set of principles for supply management that made "basic needs" a priority (but without defining what such needs explicitly were), as well as the participation of beneficiaries and the understanding that water had both economic and social value. The 1995 policy also enshrined the principle of management at the most appropriate level.

Much of the policy shift taking place in Mozambique represented alignment with emerging global narratives on water resource management, particularly those espoused by major lending institutions (and loudly explicated in documents produced by the World Bank (see for example, World Bank 1993)). This was not surprising given the "opening up" of Mozambique's economy at this time. Important new institutions to emerge included the National Water Council (1991), with a policy remit, an implementing arm – the National Water Directorate – and *Administraceos Regional de Agues* (ARAs). The latter were public institutions working to undertake decentralised river basin management, including basin-level development planning, water usage regulation and user fee collection.

Water supply delivery in Mozambique has been hampered by the legacy of civil war and an uncoordinated approach leading to very low levels of provision into the mid-1990s. 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. Nevertheless, while this helped to increase the co-ordination and coherence of service delivery approaches, local capacity to undertake community-based approaches remains low and actual data on coverage and demand is often scant or unavailable. In addition, there have been wider debates about the efficacy of seeking "full cost recovery" and the subcontracting provision to private operators in peri-urban areas

2.2 South Africa

In post-apartheid South Africa huge infrastructure development was required to enable service provision in many formerly neglected township and rural areas, but was also a major political imperative for the new government. In short, there was a forceful combination of political demand and basic need, which had to fill the vacuum between promises of black political empowerment and tangible improvements in the quality of life at a

local level. The legacy of apartheid development was a skewed sector, focused on the interests of industrial, mining and white commercial farming interests; the independent "homelands" were largely excluded from this development process (Abrams 1996). The results were a massive unserviced population which, in 1994 according to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, amounted to some 12–14 million people without formal water supplies and at least half the population with 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). This process created new institutional roles and responsibilities, including new catchment management agencies (CMAs) that would meet demand for the resources, as well as provide the means by which to increase public participation in management. In common with many other countries of the region this represented an embodiment of the concepts of IWRM within complex local and national political environments. The Water Act revolutionised the sector, introducing the concept of a strategic reserve with which to meet environmental sustainability objectives and the guaranteeing of basic human needs. At a catchment level it was envisaged that management charges would cover the actual costs of management activities. However, the rolling out of this type of management structure has been slower than anticipated, largely due to the complexity of the task and the enormous shift represented in allocation priorities by the inclusion of new stakeholders on the CMAs.

The 1994 paper on Community Water Supply and Sanitation signalled an important shift from supply-side to demand-based management, embedding principles of demand-responsive approaches and community-based management in national service delivery strategies. Build Operate Train and Transfer (BOTT) schemes were designed to speed up the delivery of new services by bringing in private sector expertise. However, there were various assumptions inherent, including that communities would be able to provide for 100 per cent cost recovery and that municipal government would be able to take on the process of managing the new service structures after a given period.

This placed considerable demands on some municipal governments, at a time when this level of government was only in an emergent form, leading to some severe criticism and concern that they were not effective means by which to establish long-term, sustainable approaches to community supply. 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 2003). Increasingly, the approach has been superseded by a concern to ensure a free basic water requirement to households. South Africa is the only country that constitutionally acknowledges the human right to water, going against current donor agendas that stress cost-recovery issues instead of rights-based ones. However, as *SLSA Research Paper* 17 shows, 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.

2.3 Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's reform process has mirrored South Africa's, particularly the increasing emphasis on new forms of integrated water management at the catchment level. Reforms have in fact progressed further in terms of implementation, largely due to the less complex water management questions in Zimbabwe, with fewer competing demands for water within key basins.

The 1998 Water Act came into force in January 2000 and paved the way for a new system of decentralised water management institutions. It not only shifted the institutional environment towards an IWRM model, but also fundamentally altered the basis on which water was apportioned, managed and paid for. New catchment and sub-catchment councils (CCs and SCCs) became responsible for managing water resources, issuing

permits and creating an effective user-management interface. The Act transformed the Water Resources Department into the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), a new parastatal funded through user fee collection through sub-catchment councils. The new government Water Strategy document stated that: 'ZINWA is to 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).

Water supply delivery in Zimbabwe was a similarly important political issue, particularly during the post-1980 independence period. Extended basic service delivery through provision of boreholes became a key government objective in the first decade post-independence. In the 1990s, particularly as structural adjustment squeezed government budgets further, an increasing focus on cost recovery emerged under the influence of external agencies and in parallel to new community-based management processes.

In common with both South Africa and Mozambique these water reform processes emerged as decentralisation to local government (Rural District Councils) and, ostensibly, a form of "democratic decentralisation" took root. The complex interrelationships between these processes are an important feature of the current policy reform process region-wide (see article 7, this *Bulletin*). 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 and 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.

3 Key thematic issues

3.1 Institutions can change: the roles people play may not

Institutional change within the reform process has been significant. It has created an institutional "mêlée" 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.

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. One of the key reasons for this was noted by an informant who stated that:

> While in the past the office of the DA [District Administrator] 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.[4]

In other cases, the institutional complexity 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 water behind a dam, 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. 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 14: 37).[5]

Institutional complexity has been compounded by the broader decentralisation process.[6] Responsibility for district-level development lies with the RDCs, yet 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 broad mandate to manage water in respective catchment boundaries. Two areas of confusion arise: first, these boundaries often cut across two or three council areas making participation in the catchment councils problematic (who has the greatest stake, who can attend meetings?); second, the water management mandate of the SCCs and CCs raises important development questions, including who and what should receive new permits for water use?

The decentralisation process created villages, wards and rural district councils, which have become 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 to 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 14: 39).[7]

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.

Participation

As well as the institutional complexity and the emergence of overlapping and competing interests involved in institutional responsibility, there has also been growing complexity in the roles and functions of participants in 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 14: 40).

Not surprisingly, the whole philosophy behind participation has changed substantially. 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 – 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 (e.g. through the Water Act of 1976, which tied together land and water rights through the legalisation of riparian rights).

New forms of participation thus must confront such historical legacies. With such skewed access

typifying past arrangements, the recent flurry of rights-based legislation is proving difficult to realise in practice The new emphasis on "stakeholder participation" is also throwing up new political challenges at the local level, including 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. During 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 *SLSA Research Paper* 3). 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. While 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 from the Councillor's. 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 15 15)

Transient institutions

Another key issue to emerge is the potential transience of institutions. The image often portrayed externally is that of permanent institutional "solutions" to development "problems", particularly in local-level resource management Community management is seen as a long-term solution. Yet, in some cases, this may in fact be merely only a transient solution One example from the Zimbabwe research 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 realise 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 15).

3.2 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 place in rural livelihoods This contestation of meanings has become heightened as a result of new water reforms, often resulting in confusion for the very water users the reforms were supposed to assist. 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 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 14: 27).[8]

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.

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. 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'.[9] 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 (see 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 14).

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 the relationships between communities themselves.

In the Sangwe communal area in Zimbabwe, the term "community" and its extension "community water point" is variously defined and interpreted, and each definition and 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 and 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.[10] Thus, a borehole drilled in Musindo village becomes a Musindo community borehole; and 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, while 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 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 15).

Changing availability of water also has the effect of shifting community "boundaries", as traditionally depicted. The community effectively 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 a need to contribute financially towards the maintenance and repairing of the borehole, the community contracts. The boundaries of communal responsibility and "ownership" 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, 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 15).

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 observe 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 now 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 5: 27).

In terms of catchment level management, 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'[11] 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$2000. I don't know how it was raised and why? But whether I know it or I don't, I have to pay' (*SLSA Research Paper* 14: 27).[12] 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.'[13]

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'.[14] Thus, there is 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

3.3 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 and which should be paid for at cost.

The significance of this "grey area" is in understanding the role of water in household livelihoods and what 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, specifically the lack of commitment to ensuring that this domestic "plus" level of water is available, reliable and affordable.[15]

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 per cent 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 (*SLSA Research Paper* 14). 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 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 (see article 2, this *Bulletin*), the longer-term planning and management of financing is extremely difficult, making cost-recovery a major implementation challenge.

4 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. These are based around global narratives on managing water under perceived conditions of scarcity, better ways of achieving efficient management structures and the creation of viable community management and financing mechanisms. Yet these sector-centric goals are overlain by broader political agendas arising out of complex political histories in which control, exploitation and, in many cases, subordination of large sections of the population have taken place.

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 the empowering of local authorities within the catchment management process through increasing their role and stake in the water management process. One vehicle might be to seek ways of using some of the locally-generated revenues for specific resource development measures at a local level. Otherwise the process of charging for water remains an extractive one from the periphery to the centre. This 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 local-level involvement in the councils could also help to facilitate the links between local knowledge, including the indigenous and competing narratives of meaning on 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 area" 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.

One major outstanding issue, particularly at the local level, will remain the challenges and competition over formal and informal systems of authority. Combining these systems of authority in new institutions, may precipitate greater coherence in decision-making or, at the least, 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 to 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. The real challenge is largely a political one and encompasses the basis of the resource, the ways in which that knowledge is articulated within institutions and the ways in which the user group and stakeholder participation processes can be used to establish more coherent approaches to common development problems at a local level

Notes

- This article draws, in particular, on *SLSA Research Papers* 14 and 15. The complete list of these papers is on page 116 of this *Bulletin* and full text versions are available at www.ids.ac.uk/slsa

1 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).

2. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Society for Technical Co-operation)

3. The difficulties of reconciling attempts towards cost recovery with safeguarding people's rights to water is a further key theme that is dealt with in *SLSA Research Paper* 17 (and see article 8, this *Bulletin*)

4. Interview with a Chiredzi District Council Official, 8 October 2001

5. Interview with a Councillor, Sangwe Communal Area, 27 July 2002.

6. 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).

7. Interview with CEO, Chimanimani RDC, 19 February 2002

8. Interview with official, Budzi Sub-Catchment Council Offices, 2 April 2002

9. Interview with Chief Dzingire, 2 April 2002.

10. 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.

11. Interview, Gwenzi, March 2002.

12 Interview, Mundanda, 16 February 2002.

13 Interview, Ndima Communal Area, 3 April 2002

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

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

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