

Local Whispers on Community Boreholes: Unveiling the Sociocultural Path for Borehole and Groundwater Sustainability in Rural Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Many factors have been identified as contributing to the sustainability of community boreholes and/or groundwater projects, from technical specifications to community power struggles. However, the effect of local sociocultural values and norms on borehole and groundwater sustainability in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa, as they are 'whispered' by the local communities within a socio-ecological milieu, has not been investigated. From the basis of the practical norms concept and socio-ecological literature, this paper explores how people's sociocultural values and norms influence local perceptions of community boreholes and/or groundwater projects. It suggests that 'locally whispered' water stories can enhance our understanding of the boreholes' and/or groundwater projects' societal impact, how they shape local actions, behaviours, and decisions for borehole and groundwater sustainability. The paper uses storytelling to investigate two distinct borehole and/or groundwater tales from Wards 13 and 17 in rural Gwanda, Zimbabwe, possessing a shared commonality. Ward 13's borehole and/or groundwater source, installed near a swamp, where snoop holes or shallow wells were traditionally dug and managed by locals, promotes community identity and ecological wisdom, while Ward 17's system, on dry capped land, reflects failed projects due to neglect of same values or norms. The paper highlights the importance of understanding local sociocultural realities in sustaining boreholes and/or groundwater projects, especially by the technical expertise. It posits the complex relationship between boreholes, groundwater, and sociocultural vibrancy, suggesting that community boreholes and/or groundwater projects should serve as "communal storytelling hubs" for sustainable water solutions.

Keywords: Sociocultural values and norms, practical norms, storytelling, socio-ecological systems, community borehole and groundwater sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Contextualizing Community Borehole and Groundwater Sustainability within Socioecological Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa

In semi-arid regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where the delicate balance between water scarcity and human sustenance is acutely felt, the significance and value of a groundwater resource should transcend the utilitarian realm, intertwining with the very fabric of local communities the water point is targeting to serve (Manzungu, 2004; Hoko et al., 2009; Adekile and Olabode, 2009; Bvirindi, 2019; Tagutanazvo and Bowora,