Water Policy in South Africa: Trust and Knowledge as Obstacles to Reform

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Abstract
The historical patterns of access to water and other areas of public service delivery in South Africa have been markedly skewed. Despite the reversal of the regime and the fact that South Africa is a middle-income country, there are a significant number of people who are water-poor and poor in governance and institutional capacity to manage water. The recurring themes in integrated water resource management, reticulation pipes, weirs and pumps, stream flow regulations, and ecological requirements are dominant in water sector discourse and are alienating for those who do not master the language. There are constraints determined by racial, economic, or social structures that retain and reproduce dominant power relations. The paper considers the relationship between knowledge, agency, and shame and posits that unequal relations of power and knowledge restrict agency, jeopardize the building of trust, and may perpetuate feelings of shame. The role of the state in opening up water policy networks and redressing issues of knowledge, power, and agency is critical.

JEL codes: Q25, Q34, Q28, H75

Keywords
shame, trust, water, participation, social networks

1. Introduction

1.1 Historical Legacy of Water in South Africa
The historical patterns of access to water and other areas of public service delivery in South Africa have been markedly skewed. Various transmutations of apartheid, from its inception to the tri-cameral parliamentary and “own affairs” administrations, eleven homeland territories, four independent homeland states known as the TBVC states that were self-governing, served to reinforce power and prolong the delivery of water along clearly differentiated racial lines.

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Water supply schemes were created to distribute water to industrial and agricultural sectors of the economy. Investment in pipes, reticulation systems, dams, inter-basin transfers, and other provision of water supplies predominantly served the white population of South Africa. Water supplies and water-borne sewage services were provided to wealthy municipalities and towns also clearly demarcated according to race. The result of these political and administrative realities was inequitable distribution of water. Townships and rural areas bore the brunt of these skews.

Black local authorities, with authority over the black townships within the “white Republic of South Africa” (RSA), suffered from inefficient management and lack of funding. From the perspective of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF)\(^1\), institutions to administer water supplies proliferated over the years and hundreds of authorities and homeland structures had responsibility for water but failed to make resources available where they were most needed (DWAF 1994).

The discussion proposes that there is a close relationship between knowledge, agency, and shame because unequal relations of power and knowledge restrict agency, jeopardize the building of trust, and may perpetuate feelings of shame. Where there is unequal distribution of resources and knowledge to gain access to those resources, there is also social exclusion that can create vicious cycles that entrench feelings of unworthiness, embarrassment—and shame.

### 1.2 Water Policies to Redress Inequality

South Africa is a water-scarce country and water resources are unevenly distributed across the country. The country suffers from extreme weather conditions and unpredictable rainfall. Despite the reversal of the regime and the fact that South Africa is a middle-income country, there are a significant number of people who are water-poor and poor in governance and institutional capacity to manage water. In 2003, approximately eight million South Africans lacked adequate water supply and about 38 percent of the population was without adequate sanitation. The disparities in water delivery affect trust between water users today and perpetuate social exclusion and feelings of shame.

There are two core legislative frameworks for transformation in this sector: the National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998) and the Water Services Act, 1997 (Act 108 of 1997).\(^1\) The implementation of these and other policies contained in supporting documents are the responsibility of the DWAF. Both acts together provide for the establishment of institutions that are given responsibility for management and distribution of water. The National Water Policy rests on the concept of integrated water resource management (IWRM) on a catchment basis and the National Water Resource Strategy must promote the management of catchments within a water management area in a holistic and integrated manner (Act No. 36 of 1998).\(^2\)

The guiding principles of the NWA are designed to promote social and economic development through the use of water and recognize the need to establish suitable water management institutions in order to achieve this purpose. The country has been divided into 19 catchment or water management areas (WMAs).\(^3\) These WMAs will be governed by a Catchment Management Agency (CMA), a self-governing body corporate. Catchment management as prescribed by the National Water Policy: “…is simultaneously a philosophy, a process and an implementation

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1Prior to 2009 was DWAF, now Department of Water and Environmental Affairs (DWAE)
2The National Water Act governs the water resource, that is the rivers, streams, dams, and ground water; while the second legislative framework, the Water Services Act, 1997, prescribes the distribution of water for domestic, business, and industrial usage.
3Schedule 6 (1) (1).
4The WMA is a large-scale area defined by macro-hydrological boundaries and provides the geophysical framework for national water planning. Current discussions around institutional realignment taking place where 19 WMA will be reduced to 9
strategy to achieve equitable access to and sustainable use of water resources by all stakeholders” (WRC 1998: 5). DWAF’s role in pioneering and promoting the establishment of CMAs and the multi-stakeholder forums, such as water user associations (WUAs), that inform them is pivotal.

The current policy framework creates an opportunity for water users who were not involved in decision-making processes prior to 1994 to interact with one another and DWAF defines the institutional spaces for these interactions to take place. The objectives of the policy are to attain equity, efficiency, and equality in water matters (DWAF 2002). The NWA, in line with global discourse on development, recognizes the need for consensual participation by relevant stakeholders, both government and civil society, and it reinforces notions that water provision should not be top-down, as was the case with the previous system of delivery, because these systems were unable to produce trust.

2. Multi-stakeholder Participation in Water Management

Over the past decades developing countries have focused on a bottom-up dynamic of development, proposed as a replacement for the failed top-down efforts whose benefits did not reach the poor. In South Africa the principles of IWRM are pivotal to the transformation process taking place in the water sector which is about redressing historical inequalities by including those who were marginalized and excluded from benefits and rights in the past. At the core of these principles is the notion of decentralization, proposed as a viable mechanism for achieving sustainable solutions for natural resource management. The phasing out of top-down strategies and the growing popularity of participation and bottom-up processes encourages greater cooperation and decision making from local users because in the ideal it provides an opportunity to obtain knowledge about local resources. In the ideal these localized systems can also be more easily flexible to adjust to changes and conditions around them and they can influence larger systems and institutions. Non-participation has an effect on the way in which these larger systems and institutions are constructed to manage the resources on which citizens depend.

As in many other areas of development, key concerns that guide IWRM, such as capacity building, creating an enabling environment, and involving stakeholders in choices that promote sustainability, have not replaced the dominant technological and economistic discourse in the area of conservation. Although multi-stakeholder involvement and decision making and management devolved to the local level, is a core principle of IWRM, concerns around equal distribution of knowledge and social agency remain in the background.

In order for multi-stakeholder involvement and a more inclusive decision-making process to be effective, local level institutions must not only have multi-stakeholder representation but these stakeholders should be able to make choices and to voice these choices. Knowledge is a pillar for participation and poor people are unable to take control over their environment and to participate in decisions to improve the quality of their lives without knowledge about the resources on which they depend. The absence of knowledge, the unequal power relationships between water users, and the inhibition of agency, frustrate the process of participation because the production of trust is inhibited and feelings of shame, that aggravate issues of social exclusion and negate social agency, are activated.

3. Shame and Trust

Shame is a notion not well explored in development literature and is something a person carries around in his/her head that makes that person feel bad about him/herself.4 It entrenches social

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4The divide between shame and stigma is sometimes unclear. Contemporary work on HIV/AIDS for instance (Farmer 1999) (Levine and Ross 2002), describe stigma and AIDS where infected persons feel
exclusion because it is a restrictor for appearing in public places where an individual might suffer ridicule or embarrassment. What is important within the context of this discussion is that shame does not sit comfortably alongside trust, pride, and self-esteem which are anticipated outcomes of the equitable distribution of resources. Readings on shame (e.g. Heller 1985; Goldin 2003, 2005, 2008, 2008a; Lynd 1958; Nussbaum 2001; Scheff 1990; Seligman 2000) confirm that, like trust, shame is a determinant of social action.

4. Narratives of Inclusion and Exclusion

The two short texts that follow are set in similar geographical settings in the Breede-Overberg, but with starkly contrasted social landscapes. The Breede-Overberg is one of the 19 demarcated water management areas in the country and is in the Western Cape. The first story is a narrative about commercial farming activities in the Ruensveld and Duivenhoks region of the Overberg part of the WMA and the second is a narrative of the fishing village of Kassiesbaai also in the Overberg WMA. The first narrative is all about building social networks in the Ruensveld and Duivenhoks between commercial farmers and government and the second is about closed networks and lack of social capital between the residents of Kassiesbaai and government. These narratives have been chosen because they illustrate the relationship between knowledge, agency, and power and provide the background for the discussion that follows later in the paper.

4.1 Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves: Ruensveld and Duivenhoks

In the late 1940s the Soil Conservation Act (No. 48 of 1946) brought together farmers who gave of their most precious resource—time—in meetings where they discussed soil conservation. Closely related to soil conservation were issues such as grazing, crop growing, and, with these, water. Later on the wives of the farmers, driven by a common experience and frustration, were to draw on these networks and become drivers for change. The following extract is pertinent:

All water for house and stock was dependent on good rains…. A cartload of water cost R18… adults can manage a water shortage. The animals just have to get by. But it is when the babies arrive that the nuisance is experienced more acutely. Drinking water from the village used to stand in our kitchen in six large milk cans…. One morning there was a terrible smell of putrid water in the kitchen. The water in the milk cans! I was fed-up, discontented and angry, and was on the warpath. (Wilson 1999: 27)

During the apartheid period, white farmers had established their own in-group social networks based on a common interest in improving water management, and the common need for drinking water motivated some farmers to activate their networks and to lobby the government of the day. Three farmers’ wives from the Duivenshoks farming area in the Overberg went to Pretoria and presented their case to the Minister of Water Affairs. As a result of negotiations between government that it is their fault and they have brought something on themselves. For the purpose of this thesis, stigma is different from shame in that there is an outward sign, a blight or disease, such as leprosy or AIDS. The borderline between stigma and shame is often fluid. For instance, prisoners on Robben Island felt that they were being stigmatized and also felt shame (Naidoo 2000). Nussbaum’s (2001) paper “Upheavals of Thought, the Intelligence of Emotions” was, in its draft form, entitled “Inscribing the Face, Shame, Stigma and Punishment.”

These concepts are familiar to urban historians (e.g. Ross 1999; Bickford-Smith et al. 1999), who consider respectability and the gains that are achieved when individuals conform to socially acceptable virtues, avoid being ostracized, and comply to the dominant values and norms that surround them.
and farmers eight months later, a water project was announced that was to bring water to 540,000 hectares (Wilson 1999).

Today there is a 1,400 km network for farmers at present; if that network of pipes had to be laid today it would cost between R250-R300 million. (Interview Overberg Water Board, May 2002)6

Government understood that it was in the economic interests of the country to provide farmers with access to water, and through negotiations with farmers, the economic consequences of water scarcity were highlighted. Small stock units could be increased from 2.11 per hectare to 2.87 with water schemes, and the positive net income for farming was of national interest. In stark contrast, the provision of water to black farm laborers was never considered a priority (Wilson 1999).

Commercial farmers in the Overberg became wise to the workings of government and to water matters. They gained self-confidence and competence and the networks gave them what Cohen and Rogers (1992) call “educative powers.” They knew exactly how much water was needed for their stock, where the water came from, what the problems were relating to water (e.g. salinity, in-stream flows, flooding, and drought), and how to work with government specialists in managing these problems. Importantly, white agriculturists learned how a government bureaucracy works, and by activating their social resources they were able to bargain with those in the corridors of power within this bureaucracy where decisions were being made.

The value of these farmers’ land was so intimately linked to water security that any issues relating to their economic wellbeing and land production were included in the policy discourse around water resource management. Exclusive networks were built between farmers in the Overberg long before the collapse of apartheid and what social capital theorists (e.g. Coleman 1988; Warren 1999) label “credit slips” were accumulated that would serve the water users forty years later.

The Duivenhoks and Ruensveld rural water schemes were built in the Overberg, and the construction of the schemes demonstrated how cooperative relationships between neighbors contributed to sustainable water management systems for white farmers. The schemes improved access to scarce resources and secured sustainable livelihoods. The success of the schemes depended on the connectedness between segments of water users in the area, and these networks created patterns of cooperation and trust between elites.

There were not only substantial financial gains from these individual and collective efforts but also feelings of pride, honor, and a sense of achievement that resonate in the passage below:

Despite the problems encountered, the completion of the scheme brought major satisfaction. It was highly gratifying to see years of planning, design and construction coming to fruition—to see raw water being extracted from the river, undergoing the purification process…. (Wilson 1999: 11)

There were “virtuous” cycles of reciprocity and there was no need to break these. The cycles that were established were virtuous for some, but of course vicious for others who were excluded from the benefits of the scheme. Farm laborers, and any other marginalized water users, were

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6The farmers were not a homogenous group and there was dissent amongst different members. As other rural water schemes were being developed, costs were revisited and commitment to the scheme by commercial white agriculturists was less secure. The Heidelberg Farmers’ Association in 1979 appealed to farmers to remain united and their scheme was agreed to with revised costs for 198,000 hectares (Wilson 1999).
not consulted when decisions were made about water and they were not provided with training or skills in the field of water resource management. They were involved in the water schemes, but as manual laborers who dug trenches for the reticulation networks (Wilson 1999). It was because of these long established state-society networks and relationships of cooperation and reciprocity that commercial farmers were the first to be approached by government in the early years after democratization. These were the farmers who were invited to participate in new schemes and to contribute to water planning and management.

The white agriculturists took a risk and as Luhmann (1995) and Seligman (2000) affirm, risk-taking considerably widened their potential for action. The action of the farmers’ wives was premised on the expectation of a future favorable response: the implementation of the scheme. The action of the government of the day was most likely premised on the expectation of a future favorable response at the polls, but nonetheless these were mutually reinforcing network relationships.

There is an attraction for networks to be closed, and the existing farmer network was an exclusive valuable resource that reinforced trustworthiness and shared obligations and expectations. Unsurprisingly, farmers are reluctant to open these networks to newcomers of a different background because they could risk jeopardizing the trustworthiness that has been gained over time. Over long periods of time the farmers established an agreed set of rules that governed the way they interacted with one another and guided the strategies that they adopted together.

### 4.2 Muddied Waters: Kassiesbaai

In stark contrast to the networks that were established in the Overberg between white farmers and government, Kassiesbaai, less than 100 kilometers away from Duivenhoks and Ruensveld in the same catchment, is poor in water and poor in social resources to manage the water. Kassiesbaai is a small colored village of about 230 households. Kassiesbaai is part of Arniston, also known as Waenhuiskrans. The blatantly skewed divides perpetuated during the apartheid regime are starkly visible because on one side of the small harbor is the well resourced holiday town known as Arniston, whilst on the other side of the harbor is the poor part of Arniston, the village of Kassiesbaai.

In Kassiesbaai, there is low trust between civil society and government and there has been no history of cooperation between government and water consumers. It is possible and even likely that Kassiesbaai’s water supply will be improved in the near future, but the decisions that are being taken in Kassiesbaai today are taking place between “knowledgeable” elites who are members of the ratepayers association, the conservation corporation, the municipality, and technical “experts.” The ratepayers association is dominated by the voices of residents who mainly come to Arniston during the holiday season. There is almost no consultation with the permanent residents of Kassiesbaai, and trust between water users in Arniston and the water users of Kassiesbaai is also tenuous. The residents of Kassiesbaai are suspicious of public officials in the Agulhas Municipality, under whose jurisdiction they fall, because they do not believe that the public officials of their municipality have their interests at heart. One of the residents, an elected councilor involved for some time in negotiations for water on behalf of the community with the local municipality, notes:

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8The apartheid system classified people into racial groups “black,” “white,” “Indian,” and “colored.” The term colored in South Africa refers to people of mixed-race of Khoisan descent as distinct from black Africans.

9Arniston Waenhuiskrans, on the southern coast of South Africa, is about 150 kilometers east of Cape Town. This “Place with Two Names” had its first permanent residents in 1905. In 1932 there was a transfer of land establishing a Fishermen’s Union Committee where 250 households stand on a plot administered by this union. Today the whole village is a national monument.
I have been talking to the municipality for years but I still don’t understand anything about water. Oh, water is such a difficult thing. I don’t know where the water comes from or what is going on but only that it doesn’t taste good and that this has been like that for centuries. (Interview Arniston, Kassiesbaai Councillor, February 2004)

Because local government is the sphere of government closest to the people, councilors have the opportunity to engage with and respond to their constituencies in relatively small areas. But in the case of small towns such as Kassiesbaai, far too often the councilors have neither the knowledge—nor the authority—to promote and protect the interests of their town.

The relationship between scarcity of water and scarcity of social ingenuity to resolve the Kassiesbaai water problem is stark. There has been a radical reversal of the regime, however the problems of organization and of distribution of information and negotiation of powers, for those who were not part of water policy networks during the apartheid years, are deep-rooted. Water consumers in Kassiesbaai suffer both water resource and social resource deprivation.

Old networks are not easily unstuck. The deepening of democracy and the building of trust between water users depends on wealth not only in terms of economic goods but in terms of knowledge. Without a real understanding of the water cycle and the principles of integrated water resource management, and without a radical change in the way in which government officials interact with local water users, networks will remain exclusive rather than inclusive. Trust between different segments of water users will be hard to broker.

4.3 Making Cracks in Exclusive Networks of Trust

It is through shared meanings and experience that, over time, thick trust and social capital was established amongst white farmers and bureaucrats responsible for water management. The competing pockets of social capital that were formed during the apartheid years shape the way in which stakeholders operate today and entrench feelings of distrust between different groups of water users. On the one hand, there is the social capital of groups such as those white agriculturists and water experts that produced the Duivenhoks and Ruensveld rural water schemes, and on the other, the contrasting context of the everyday experience of water users in black (or colored) townships, such as Kassiesbaai. Water users in such towns have developed a profound distrust for government officials—and white farmers—and this distrust, so deeply encrusted into the social fabric, will take years to erase.

Black farm laborers, who were not owners of land, developed their networks and trust amongst themselves out of long-term grievances and a shared sense of marginalization from these embedded water networks. These different kinds of trust relationships were more tenuous. Political analysts (e.g. Ruiters 1996; Marais 2001) reflect on the way in which activist networks that were formed through shared long-term grievances were constantly undermined by the police and apartheid authorities. These authorities were eager to use any occasion to smash allegiances that threatened their regime. The police created cracks wherever possible through gossip, slander, and undermining the social networks that were being constructed. Under this climate of rule and divide, trust was difficult to build and unlikely to be sustained.

In the water sector people are unwilling to take a risk. It is unlikely that new social capital will be produced because as critics (e.g. Schaap and van Twist 1999) claim, restricted networks or social fixation always intrude with the way in which people connect. Network closedness curtails innovation and inhibits the formation of new alliances. As noted above, there is an obvious attraction for closed networks because these are also more likely to hold in their trustworthy members from those outside. The likelihood of white agriculturists admitting colored small-scale farmers into their water policy networks is slight. As the provision of water (and other services)
to the majority of South Africans was not a priority, it is unsurprising that ten years into democracy it is difficult to co-opt water users into networks from which they have been excluded because they have no history of trust or common meaning.

The short narratives presented here portray how people who are connected to social and political networks are able to create virtuous—and circumvent vicious—cycles of inclusion that help them to pass on information more efficiently and to gain access to new sources of information. Information empowered the commercial farmer group to demand transparency and accountability of government officials and to influence decisions that would have a lasting effect on their social and economic wellbeing. At the other extreme, the water users of Kassiesbaai have not had opportunities to build trust with public officials, and the overall effect on their social and economic wellbeing is negative.

5. Institutions Can Reinforce Patterns of Exclusion

The balance between knowledge, power, and agency is key if principles of democracy are to be applied practically and not merely advertised and displayed as “nice to have.” Institutions could be sites where trust is nurtured and theorists of the new institutionalism (e.g. Powell and Dimaggio 1991) contend that institutions are places where negotiations take place and that they create a dynamic space due to the action of individuals who influence and change these sites. But this constantly adapting system of change can only thrive when there is an equalizing of power and all members are able to influence and shape the outcomes. Institutions will not change if the voice of dissent is amputated.

The overwhelming dominance of white agriculturists in the fora is likely to be a manifestation of distrust for the post-apartheid regime and a determination to control their own futures in the water sector, because—as the historically advantaged and newly disadvantaged minority—they can no longer trust government to do this on their behalf. Ironically, one of the unintended consequences of participation is that the patterns of the past are not only reproduced but reinforced. Commercial white farmers can no longer carry on with “business as usual,” and one of the most significant water law principles approved by Cabinet in 1996, the abolition of riparian water rights and private ownership of land, has deeply affected the allocation and use of water. This fundamental principle that water is a national asset, together with a host of other employment equity rules and basic principles in the Bill of Rights enshrined in the Constitution, challenges farmers. Commercial farming is therefore more risky today than it was at the time of planning and implementing the Ruensveld and Duivenshoks schemes. There is little chance that commercial farmers will leave this up to trust because there is simply too much to lose. For this segment of water users, the anticipated benefit of attending meetings far outweighs the cost.

There is a gap between policy and its implementation, and some of the reasons include: information overload; preset agendas; and exclusive dominant knowledge regimes that restrict reform and reproduce a style of government that is top-down, cementing closed networks and historical patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Decisions are taken, whatever their outcomes and whether or not they reform or improve access to water for those who do not have it, with or without the voice of many of the ordinary water users. Actors are prepared to cooperate in decision-making processes, but unless the benefits are higher than their costs there is little incentive to participate. There are consequences for participatory development when there is non-participation, and one of the serious consequences is the inability to effectively implement policy. Good information sharing can create a dialogue between state and non-state actors. State actors are dependent on citizens and users not only so that they can ensure the responsiveness of their policies and practices and legitimize their policies, but because sustainable development requires cooperation and synergy between the efforts of government and civil society.
6. Knowledge, Power, and Agency

The use of universal knowledge resounds over the specific localized knowledge and trustworthy others who have been given the authority to act on behalf of water consumers, for instance councillors and community leaders who are called on to assume roles that they are unable to meet. In order to retain trustworthiness amongst those who have elected them, they conceal their inadequacy in grasping the “desirable knowledge,” the “facts,” and following the impulse to remain “respectable” or honorable in the eyes of their constituency, deceive themselves and those they represent.9

The management systems that are being set up for catchment management provide empirical evidence for what some social capital theorists identify as vicious or virtuous cycles (e.g. Putnam and Pharr 2000; Ingelhart 1999; Krishna 2002). Those who have meaningful interchanges today are those who have already gained trust in the past and who have the language and the knowledge to exchange ideas with one another and with those in power. The exchanges are familiar and those who participate hold congruous views and interests. Water users who today have a good stock of trust are those who have had an opportunity in the past to believe that provincial state officials and consultants are trustworthy and that they will protect their resource interests.10

It is those who have not only the ability but, importantly, the authority to name things (Ribot and Peluso 2001) who are best able to profit and control the process of water management.11 These authors emphasize that knowledge is central in determining who can benefit from which resources. But there are barriers to acquiring knowledge, and the information that is made available to water users is “scientific,” largely “universal,” and a large proportion is devoted to the protection, use, development, conservation, management, and control of the resource (National Water Act, No. 36 of 1998).12 The CMA focus is about resource management and the discussions are mostly about technical concerns rather than the delivery of basic services (water and sanitation): the most pressing need for the poor.

Learning about the water cycle and the effects of patterns of water consumption on people and the environment is crucial if water users are to be able to make choices and be active in decisions concerning the institutions that are set up to manage water. In order to be responsible agents in the domain of water (for instance to report leakages; conserve water; decide which level of water services can be afforded; maintain responsible hygiene and health practices; minimize pollutants to ground water), water consumers need to know about a whole range of problems to do with water. But it is also important that those with “scientific” knowledge and expertise in these areas gain knowledge about the living conditions of the poor and that there is an exchange of different types of knowledge.

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9Mitchell and Schoeffel’s (2002) analysis of Noam Chomsky’s critique of power highlights Chomsky’s insights into the way in which actors shroud their working in “mystery” so that the information is “above the ordinary person” (2002). Here again the notion of shame is pertinent. When ordinary persons/water users seemingly accept decisions that are not clearly explained and are shrouded in mystery, the actor will be unlikely to take the risk of speaking out for fear of ridicule.

10The distinction between systems trust and people trust is important; for instance in this case trust is given to individuals but not necessarily to the politics of the ANC government. As the state is seen by the majority of South Africans as the protector of rights and carries the burden of delivery to the poor, is it necessary for poor people themselves to be drivers of development? Non-participation (at least in some cases) might also be a manifestation of high trust in the elected African National Congress.

11Ribot and Peluso’s (2001) argument is that scientific narratives are used to control and profit from natural resources and land use. Access includes much more than merely owning property.

12Chapter 2, Part 1, Section 5 (3).
6.1 Erkenntnisinteresse or Knowledge Interest

Information sharing can equalize partners and groups whereas unequal access to knowledge exacerbates in-group and out-group dynamics, facilitating either vicious or virtuous cycles of engagement and shaping the way in which actors are able, or unable, to cooperate with one another. Vroom (2002) refers to erkenntnisinteresse (knowledge interest) that divides the domain of the non-scientific—the average practitioner’s experience—with that of the scientific, and this is a contested terrain where the ability of individuals to make choices and voice those choices is intimately connected to features of power.

The recurring themes in integrated water resource management—reticulation pipes, weirs and pumps, stream flow regulations, and ecological requirements—are dominant in water sector discourse and are distinctly alienating for those who do not master the language. The elected councilor of Kassiesbaai has no voice in decision-making institutions because he does not have the “scientific” knowledge or erkenntnisinteresse. There are clear links between knowledge and self-esteem, and someone who is poor and uneducated will remain silent in order to avoid embarrassment or shame. This vicious cycle is not transitory, and as analysts reflecting on themes of shame (e.g. Heller 1985; Scheff 1990) confirm, it reverberates within larger systems and institutions.

Those who have access to the dominant knowledge regime are included; those who do not have it are not. The acquisition of knowledge is itself a process, and there are no templates as to how it can be achieved. With the right information, the marginalized have the capacity to organize and to challenge authority. In doing so, a sense of self is enhanced and with better self-esteem there is likely to be more trust and less shame. There is a critical connection between meaningful transfers of knowledge, high trust, and absence of shame-based feelings.

6.2 Government Approaches to Policy Implementation

Although the ideological shift in the water sector has moved towards a focus on people, the problem in the Breede-Overberg WMA is that the old way of doing things has not yet shifted, and the empirical evidence points to a gap between the ideological vision about rights to participation and equality enshrined in the Bill of Rights, the National Water Act (No. 36 of 1998), and the Water Services Act (No. 108 of 1997) and their practical implementation.

The focus remains top-down, giving preference to those who have been charged to carry out policy at the expense of interactions with water users who would be tasked with shaping that policy. The numerous meetings that are part of the CMA process in the Breede-Overberg are supposedly, in the spirit of the law, agency-enabling and agency-enhancing opportunities where there is what DWAF (2001) refers to as “mutual respect, compassion, comprehension and appreciation of fellow members” (2001: 5). These attitudes are important cognitive and emotional attributes that act as contributors to a common vision and are conducive to trust. Top-down interventions constrict trust building.

In the ideal, the commitment to participation puts the focus on inclusion and opening up networks for collaboration, but it is significant that Williams (2004) speaks of participation as a new “tyranny” because the way in which the previously marginalized are mainstreamed binds them “more tightly to structures of power that they are not then able to question” (2004: 563). In referring to participation as a “tyranny,” the effects of interventions by government become far less benign and can be viewed as a way of ensuring that the marginalized lose, rather than gain, power.

6.3 Trust in Institutional Settings

Change from a non-inclusive and interventionist approach of government is particularly critical within the South African context where distrust is imprinted in the historical memory of the
majority of South Africans. Ineffective performance in the arena of communication and information-sharing certainly undermines trust. From Williams’s (2004) analytic perspective, the performance would be considered as effective and not ineffective public sector performance because it has achieved its intended purpose of retaining power. The approach of government to policy implementation is overwhelmingly top-down and, as such, discussions and sharing knowledge are curtailed because the exchanges are controlled. Selznick (1949) put forward the idea of cooperation, seeing this as a process that absorbs actors into the system in order to avert threats to the stability of the system. Once they are on board they are less likely to interrupt the business of transformation and the way in which water management systems are built. Water users who qualify as “previously disadvantaged” have been co-opted into the formal meeting spaces.

The extracts that follow reflect the way in which knowledge, agency, and power are influenced by, and in turn influence, institutional settings in the Breede-Overberg, reinforcing the premise that unequal relations of power and unequal knowledge inhibit trust. The extracts reflect that it is power that dominates and controls the knowledge flows and maintains unequal relationships within the institutional settings. Information overload crowds out the space for meaningful exchanges. There is very little contestation around any information that is passed “down.” This is contrary to what is said:

It is here today that you have the opportunity to comment and input into any of the issues that are shown and to say whether you are happy with the process. We expect you to give your input…. (DWAF official Breede-Overberg, November 2001)

The extract above that includes the words “we expect you to give input” could be a frank invitation to contribute but it might also be seen as a symptom that those in charge succumbing to the temptation to control the discussions. The following response to questions is not unusual but it contradicts what was said above:

Let’s get a move-on. We must just press ahead otherwise we will never advance and only go backwards. This is not the place here to discuss these matters. People can discuss things later—we must submit the plan and we are getting there. (DWAF official, Breede WMA, November 2001)

Newman et al. (2004) refer to this as “fobbing off” because there is almost no time for questions or additional input from members that is of any significance. This type of language is closed and shows an unwillingness of those in authority to consider the voices of those who are not, in their view, part of the in network. Phrases such as “we’re not discussing that now” and “you can’t consider every angle” are words that reflect exclusion and closedness. Utterances of this nature reveal that actors are either unwilling or unable to perceive the view of another that might differ from their own. Government officials are reluctant to open up discussions and deliberately try to reduce complexity in considering new angles that might challenge the presupposed strategy for the CMA as “we will never get anywhere that way” (DWAF official, September 2001).

6.4 Gender and the Filtering Effect of the Frame

There is also a gender dimension to knowledge, power, and agency, and it has been proposed by theorists who are concerned with participatory development (e.g. Parfitt 2004; Thompson 2002) that tools deployed to drive participation and equalize power relationships also operate largely in the public domain and reinforce the exclusion of women’s issues. Aspirations for basic needs, development, and social and economic growth include the needs of those who remain in the domestic sphere. The worries of wives and mothers whose water issues, such as absence of toilets,
inadequate washing facilities, and poor quality drinking water, are domestic and private, but they are also critical concerns of everyday living and individual and family wellbeing. Pushed onto the backstage, these matters remain incoherent or invisible in the public sphere.

The way in which selective types of knowledge are perpetuated is pertinent. Technocrats use terms that are different from those of the public who voice their fears about water shortage or “dirty water” in ways that are considered by the technically minded as incomprehensible or unintelligible. The responses to many questions are dismissive and uninformative, what Schaap and van Twist (1999) refer to as the “filtering effect of the frame.” The “filtering effect of the frame” is a way to resist change or threats to the stability of existing systems and structures. There is tension between DWAF’s desire to redress inequalities of the past by creating an enabling environment and their need to “get the job done.” This means identifying technically efficient people to perform specific tasks on behalf of the CMA and other water management institutions. Given the legacy of apartheid, those who are able to undertake the tasks, as proposed, are likely to be those with technical expertise in the domain of water and whose language fits the filter, but they are also likely to be white, and this entrenches lines of division that were drawn during the apartheid regime.

As noted above, the new institutional theorists such as Powell and Dimaggio (1991) contend that institutions are rife with conflict, contradiction, and ambiguity, but unequal access to knowledge renders impotent the ambiguities and contradictions that are inherent in any system. The empirical data reflect very little conflict or contradiction, suggesting that these institutions are restricted sites that will not produce trust. Power controls the way in which information is shared and restricts the sharing of adequate information. Information sharing is curtailed because of unequal power, knowledge, and agency. Unequal access to knowledge perpetuates in-group/out-group dynamics and vicious cycles of exclusion.

Scheff (1990) notes that “in modern society, experts usually see laypersons in their own society, that is non-experts, as an out group whose common sense is tantamount to ignorance” (1990: 142). The selected extract “let’s get a move on” demonstrates how the confrontation between different points of view is avoided based on “the” facts, in this case that this is not the venue for this discussion to take place, although, if the frame of reference were different, it could be. This dismissal avoids consultation and acts as a safety valve to ensure that there is no threat to the existing status quo. Understandably too much consultation could inhibit “moving on,” but too little undermines deep changes that are ordained by the law and it reinforces unequal relationships of power.

6.5 Localized Expert Knowledge

Many local water users, although lacking in competence in the “scientific” generalized language of old water user networks, possess high levels of localized specialist knowledge in water matters. The following extract describing the shortage of water on colored farm schools in the Matroosberg Area of the WMA is relevant:

There is no water at the property. Water is carted from the resort or taken from a canal… closest source is 200 m. …water is obtained from Mr. Du Toit. There is one standpipe and a water tank is needed as irrigation activities in the summer leave the school without water…. at Nuy primary school, the rainwater tank is broken and there is no permanent water supply. And at Glen Heattlie School, there is no water supply. Wysersdrift Primary, no permanent water supply …. (Breede River Basin Study 1999)

This extract reflects the keen knowledge of water scarcity within a rural school context that is expressed by a school principle. But the issues of “ordinary” water users are not discussed, and as a result the water users with these troubles remain silent. Concerns with the quality of water,
weirs and pumps, inlets and outlets, fynbos,\textsuperscript{13} or whale-watching are high on the agenda, and the ecological reserve, for the first time a consumer in its own right, is also eloquently represented. The “mundane” water matters—such as having water to wash hands after using a toilet at the local primary schools—that impact on the lives of many water users everyday are not brought into the public sphere and remain invisible.

The concerns of the ordinary water user (approximately 80 percent of civil society in the Breede-Overberg WMA forms part of that social segment that were previously excluded—and who are colored or black) are not prioritized:

We try and get them to come but it is difficult. They will go to meetings in the township about housing and other things but they won’t come here. We have had numerous public participation meetings but it is really difficult. (Interview, Consultant, Overberg WMA, February 2002)

There are several reasons why it is difficult “to get them to come.” Water users with higher incomes more easily have the time and the money to get to meetings; those with higher incomes can invest more resources in consolidating their networks and in turn acquire more social capital; the costs of participating are higher for the poor; water is not the most pressing issue, for instance, ranking priorities for the poor, housing, jobs, and education have been ranked over and above water;\textsuperscript{14} and finally, but not least, there is no consequence in not participating because decisions get made anyway with or without their voice.

Non-participation perpetuates closed networks and it also reduces social and cognitive diversification as the same type of people gather together for meetings. Even where there is social and cognitive variation amongst the water users, the dominant discourse and power relationships that play themselves out neutralize these variations.

\section*{6.6 Stoep Talk Breaks Bounds of Formal Settings}

Powerful elites are able to use existing information that they do have available to strengthen their arguments and there is very little accurate information to counteract the premises of these elites. Reasons for lack of information by participants include low literacy and numeracy, factors that limit the ability of many ordinary water users to participate in discussions about numbers presented in budgets or financial forecasting.

The effectiveness of institutions at the local level is jeopardized if the voices of local people are muted. When trust is not brokered formally, shared values may be exchanged informally or what Goffman (1959) describes as experiences that are “backstage” with “off-the-record” performances. During the course of water committee meetings, important exchanges take place in the corridors, or in the “the ambiguous space between inside and outside, between public and private…” (Wicomb 1998: 104). These are meetings on the “stoep.” Wicomb (1998) describes shame as “cross-eyed and shy, stalking the post-colonial world broken mirror in hand, reproducing itself in puzzling distortions” (1998: 92). Although not suggesting that shame can be generalized and that all who do not have the expertise and knowledge feel shame, the “puzzling distortions” are worth considering as they provide insights into the social configurations that exist on the “stoep” and in the interstitial spaces around the formal venues.

\textsuperscript{14}An indigenous vegetation peculiar to the Cape Province.

\textsuperscript{15}Clark (2003) notes that the first priority = job, second priority = housing, third priority = education, fourth priority = income, fifth priority = family. The survey was undertaken in Wallacedene (squatter town, Cape Town Metro) and Murraysburg (deep rural Karoo) in March 1998.
The interstitial or liminal spaces are understood well by anthropologists; Victor Turner uses the term to describe ritual where “those being moved in accordance with a cultural script were liberated from normative demands ... and were betwixt and between...” (1974: 13). As water users move into the “bewixt or between” on the “stoeps” they are less constricted by the normative demands that confront them in the formal spaces. These are significant spaces for exchanges because the formal meetings are crowded with information and, often because the meetings start late, are interrupted before the agendas are fully complete. It is in the spaces “betwixt or between,” on the “stoeps,” that knowledge is circulated in backstage ways. Significant knowledge, experience, and insights about the problems and strategic needs of local water users do exist, but it is not always expressed in the way that the all-pervasive rational scientific paradigm supposes. Unequal access to knowledge molds in-groups and out-groups in the informal spaces because interpersonal trust is far more difficult to build across different groups of people than between people in the same groups.

6.7 Impenetrability of the “Real” World Out There

It is possible that shifting the “science” from technological infrastructure and water discourse to people discourse would help reconfigure social regroupings and render inter-group exchanges more probable. Bureaucrats and public officials do not manage change easily, and in resisting change resort to top-down interventionist mechanisms that are counterproductive for trust. As the developing of the CMA is seen largely as a technical process, the “rational-choice” paradigm of “scientific knowledge” and pipes and pipelines of the bureaucrat is juxtaposed to any other objective reality and the astute knowledge of ordinary people.

The notion of hard knowledge implies an acceptance of “facts” that are recognized in the real world out there because they are part of a male world that is impervious and dogmatic. The danger of seeing from this perspective is that unnecessary resources are dispensed in order to “skill up” the public and to develop training manuals or mini courses on a variety of topics. But this reinforces standards that are being set by bureaucrats and “technical” experts rather than accepting that there are other forms of knowledge that non-technical experts bring to the table and that the so-called “experts” need skilling up in this and other domains.

7. Honor, Shame, and Trust

Although predominantly white and male, there are, as already discussed, cognitive and social variations between water users, but these differences are muffled because water users who do not form part of the dominant knowledge regime that permeates the venues fear embarrassment and avoid being seen to be unintelligible. The following extract reflects on an experience of shame where the water user remains silent to avoid embarrassment:

I say nothing—I have nothing to say but it is high time that they have asked me to be there so I can learn. No I am not ashamed but I will not speak as I cannot. Shame is about being hungry. I know shame, when I am inside the committee I will just say yes until I learn and they will not know how poor or ignorant I am. It is a terrible thing when you feel hollow inside. Hunger can make you feel this and not knowing anything can make you feel this. (Interview small-scale farmer, November 2001)

Empowering people implies that people change their perceptions about themselves so that they are able to claim their right to equal treatment irrespective of their social or economic position in society. Positive social action enhances autonomy and freedom, and brings about what Sheff (1990)
has defined as *gleichaltung*.\textsuperscript{15} *Gleichaltung* was expressed well in the feeling that the Ruensveld and Duivenshok rural water schemes brought to the agriculturists as “the scheme brought major satisfaction. It was highly gratifying to see years of planning, design and construction coming to fruition.” Quite the opposite happens when social interaction results in embarrassment, criticism, and insult, and one of the outcomes is the production of shame. The text “yes that I feel hollow inside, hunger can make you feel this and not knowing anything can make you feel this” is the opposite of an experience of *gleichaltung* or wellbeing.

### 7.1 Schizoid Transformation Process

The deep social cleavages of the past are apparent in the way in which water users engage with one another, reinforcing cleavages and vicious cycles of exclusion. Attempts to bridge the social cleavages are flawed.

I have to report back but I don’t even know what I am supposed to say. And all the decisions have already been made. I don’t feel OK to put up my hand and say anything because there are all kinds of other things being said like volumes of water and the environment and I don’t know about these things. I just know that the people in my constituency don’t have good water supplies. (Councillor, October 2001)

In principle democratically elected and accountable local councilors are supposed to represent the needs of those who have voted for them, but as they are unable to intervene on behalf of the people they represent, and because they are unable to transfer knowledge which they have not yet accumulated, their role is undermined.

Councilors are expected to placate the authorities, but at the same time they are confronted with urgent demands for material improvements for the residents whom they represent and who see them as trustworthy and as representing their interests. Many of the councilors are poor in the resources to manage water and are not proficient in “scientific” language. All too often those who are poor in water are also poor in the ability to influence decisions about water that they need. Councilors are supposed to understand what is being discussed, and their “community” assumes that they have the power to network and influence water policy networks, but this power, invested in them, is thin and in reality they have little influence in building these water policy networks. The member co-opted onto such a committee experiences both honor (as an elected or nominated member) and shame (as an unequal partner who cannot negotiate) in a schizoid transformation process. Tension between retention of power as a leader and powerlessness as a committee member is real, and the member is given a voice to attend but is unable to be vocal. The counselors will avoid embarrassment or feelings of inadequacies and might also be too reticent to lose respectability and status. For this reason these individuals are unlikely to confront values that belong to a world that is considered to be superior or desirable and yield to the dominant status quo. The legitimacy, or lack of legitimacy, of the procedure is uncontested.\textsuperscript{16} A strong authority, on whom an individual is dependant, is alienating. Not feeling “OK” to put up one’s hand for fear of ridicule is a feeling of undesirable inferiority. People will do anything to avoid embarrassment, as shame is a painful emotion. People leave, are silent, or withdraw completely rather than feel shame. Trust opportunities are lost and networks remain fixated.

\textsuperscript{15}According to Scheff (1990) this German word is used to capture an idea in mechanical engineering where cogs are aligned so perfectly that there is virtually no friction.

\textsuperscript{16}These findings have been confirmed in various case studies conducted for the water sector case study commissioned by Impulelelo Innovation Trust between January 2004 and May 2004. The same findings
8. Conclusion

Distrust is deeply embedded in the historical memory of the majority of citizens of South Africa who have been subordinated to a strong authority. Many of the forums and committees are governed by water users with entrenched habits, practices, and networks whose focus on infrastructure capital has not been replaced by a focus on social assets and, more importantly, by a focus on ways of negotiating and engaging meaningfully with one another. As this is the case, these forums repetitively render voiceless the claims of many water users and intensify the interests of others. White commercial farmers and elites who formed part of old water policy networks have learned to cooperate and have developed virtuous cycles of reciprocity and trust between themselves and between government. Importantly, although there are conflicts, tensions, and dissent amongst these groups over new unfamiliar and contested water issues, these farmers know where and how to proceed with their grievances and they possess the “scientific” language to present these grievances to government officials.

At the other extreme, the water users in Kassiesbaai did not and they do not have social and political networks that are agency-enabling. Cooperation around funerals, religious or sports events resonate more loudly than cooperation around water matters. Knowledge across domains is limited, as is the social capital to manage water for those who are most in need of the resource. Although social capital is a greatly needed resource to drive forward the developments in the water sector, it is in short supply.

The absence of knowledge, the unequal power relationships between water users, and the inhibition of agency inhibits the production of trust and activates feelings of shame. There are constraints determined by racial, economic, or social structures that retain and reproduce dominant power relations. In order to break the vicious cycles of marginalization or discrimination, the way in which progressive policies are implemented requires a different approach by government so that trust can develop.

Black water consumers, who were not part of the specialist bodies during the apartheid years, are not currently water experts. However, over time, according to policy, it is expected that they will become part of the regulatory process. Whatever influences might come from below, the role of the state in opening up water policy networks and redressing issues of knowledge, power, and agency is critical.

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were also relevant in previous fieldwork undertaken for a similar sanitation and water study during the period June 2003-August 2003.


**Bio**

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