

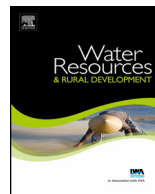


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## The role of social actors in water access in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence from Malawi and Zambia



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### ABSTRACT

Access to water in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) continues to be a challenge to the extent that there are more people without access to water in 2015 than in 1990. This indicates that current approaches to water provision have been ineffective. Governments have failed to provide a structure, mechanisms or approaches that guarantee water for ALL, resulting in a vacuum which has been 'filled' by a number of social actors (NGOs, Faith Based Organisations, Donors). This paper examines the social actors involved in water access and provision in Malawi and Zambia, analysing the existing methods and approaches used by them in the sector. It seeks increased understanding of the contributions and the nature of influence of each social actor group. This was achieved by collecting data on social actors through a combination of methods: focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and workshops. Social actor

*Abbreviations:* ADB, African Development Bank; CADECOM, Catholic Development Commission of Malawi; CCJP, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace; CHAZ, Churches Health Association of Zambia; CSOs, Civil Society Organisations; CUs, Commercial Utilities; DFID, Department for International Development; DHID, Department of Housing and Infrastructural Development; DTF, Devolution Trust Fund; EU, European Union; FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization; FBOs, Faith Based Organisations; FINIDA, Finnish International Development Agency; GIZ, Germany International Cooperation; LAs, Local Authorities; MGD, Millennium Development Goal; MLGH, Ministry of Local Government and Housing; MMEWD, Ministry of Mines, Energy and Water Development; NGOs, Non-Governmental Organisations; NWASCO, National Water Supply and Sanitation Council.

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analyses of the data shaped the findings. The findings indicate that water provision is multifaceted requiring improved coordination and cooperation among social actors to streamline and focus on the provision of for ALL. It draws attention to the need for Governments to take a leading role by facilitating long term investment in the sector and promoting initiatives which incorporate the right to water access. It concludes that in order to achieve universal access to water, a new perception of rights and responsibilities is vital in communities, donors, NGOs and the public sector as one step towards reducing the number of people without water in the future.

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## 1. Introduction

Water has acquired enormous relevance in relation to the survival of all living systems on earth, to the extent that 2013 was declared the “International Year of Water Cooperation” by the United Nations (UN-Water, 2013). On World Water Day 2010, the UN General Secretary declared that more people die from unsafe water than from all forms of violence, including war. He also postulated the possibility of this important resource, which has been described by some as gold of the future, becoming a source of wars between nations (UN, 2010).

Water in all its forms has been the basis of civilisations and settlement patterns (Priscoli, 1999). The quantity and quality of access have influenced and continue to influence life outcomes in various human societies (Uguru, 2014). These life outcomes are sustained by the various forms in which water is channelled through agriculture, industry and domestic uses (Rosegrant et al., 2002). In particular, in order to guarantee human survival, access to water for agricultural and domestic purposes is vital.

Unfortunately, water has become a source of profit as opposed to being treated as a fundamental human right (UN OHCHR, 2010). Some authors have alerted against the corporate takeover of this essential living system. This has occurred through unchecked privatisation and other forms of public private partnerships, which in many cases reduces the ability of the poor to access safe water (Barlow and Clarke, 2004). The UN MDG for water was to halve by 2015, the proportion of the world population without sustainable access to safe drinking water. Water access in this paper is defined as having access to adequate water supply both in quantity and quality for drinking purposes at reasonable distance to users or households' dwelling. Despite the achievement of this goal, about 663 million people in developing regions are without access, and the right to water for all purposes is denied to approximately 3.5 billion people (IDA, 2010; JMP, 2014, 2015).

Water provision in developing countries is not structured or streamlined to the same extent as it is in the developed countries, where the right to water is guaranteed to all citizens (Shah, 2010). As a result, in the developing world, where this degree of structure does not exist, water provision depends on the participation of a wide range of stakeholders described in this paper as “social actors”. In this paper, social actors refer to human entities or individuals with direct or indirect influence in the system under consideration. Social actors range from government, private sector and NGOs to water users and community groups (WPP, 2010).

This paper focuses on the roles of social actors involved in water provision in Malawi and Zambia. Their involvement and the existing methods and approaches used by these social actors in water resource management are examined.

## 2. Methodology

Many social actors are involved in the provision of water in communities, so a key objective of this project was to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the social actors to acquire an in-depth understanding of their roles in the water sector both in Malawi and Zambia and with a view to providing some recommendations for improved practice.

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