



# **Water in Africa: Hydro-Pessimism or Hydro-Optimism?**

# **Água em África: Hidro-pessimismo ou Hidro-optimismo**

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# **The Politics of Water Delivery in Rural Communities of Nigeria: Deep or Shallow Commitment?**

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# Background

- People in urban and rural communities depended on diverse sources of water supply (1970s and 80s). In rural areas, people depended on water from streams, rivers and rainwater harvesting.
- In urban areas, people walked to the street taps for portable water supply by the government water agency
- The water supply by the 1990s became erratic, and totally unreliable. Government poor maintenance culture of the basic utilities and infrastructure led to a state of near collapse.
- In areas where industrial activities or oil extraction activities were high such as the Niger Delta communities, rivers and streams have become polluted and reliance on traditional sources of water supply became a problem of acute water supply.

# Research Questions

- To assess the politics of water supply in rural communities in the context of participatory development
- Portable Water Privatization: deliberate or chance? (deep or shallow commitment?)

# Framework of Analysis

- Political ecology: interested in conflicts over access and control of natural resources (Peet and Watts 2004; Bryant and Bailey 1997).
- Combines the actor-oriented approach to analyse unequal power relations among social actors in the development process (Long and Long 1997).

# Actors in water supply

- Several actors: government agencies, individuals, corporations, NGOs, and the communities (uncoordinated efforts)
- Sources of funding ranges from internal levies, collaboration, and donor agencies external to the communities
- Some of the efforts have resulted into conflicts and project failure.

# Case studies

## Private Sector (Individuals)

- What is the state of portable water supply in Nigeria?
- The public taps have run dry and each community or individuals are now taking their destinies in their own hands.
- Earliest form of privatization took the form of people sinking boreholes in their compounds for domestic use. Owners subsidized costs by selling water to the public (buckets and bowls about US\$1 for 100 litres).
- Boreholes consist of submersible water pump, stand-by-generator, water tanks, etc.
- In urban cities, this has become the prevalent source of water supply. Almost every household that can afford it, now sink boreholes in their compounds, and it is not unusual to sight about a dozen borehole in one locality. The proliferation of water stations is a serious cause for concern for water management.

# TNC's effort: Pacification for ecological devastation or to fill a needs gap?

- TNC's oil activities polluted community farmland and watercourses (sulphur and acid rain corrode rooftops)
- The case of the Bodo water project in Ogoni where its community development project engaged only a section of the community (visible power blocks)
- Community participation was passive: no more than hiring the youths to lay the pipes to build community water facility
- Hiring of contractors and supervision was by the TNC
- Contract believed to have been awarded to stooges which was a major source of conflict in the community



# Results

- Water facility collapsed soon after commissioning and the contractor left leading to serious conflicts, rumours
- There was no community management committee put in place to manage the water project (funding, diesel, operators,)
- Project facility vandalized and overgrown with weeds
- Community participation was passive

# NGO's Effort

- In Akassa communities, clean water is in acute supply, yet community participation denied the existence of water as a priority
- Why was this?
- \*In the last decade, there has been at least three efforts to sink borehole in the community, and each effort ended in failure (poor engineering to cut costs?)
- \*Strong perception that Water projects were wastepipes through which funding is channelled to line pockets by politicians and influential community members (mismanagement)
- \*The cost of borehole was significantly high beyond what the NGO can possibly afford.
- Result: Participatory development project become a means to deny water as a priority in community development

# Contrastive Elements

- For Shell, Community participation has been strategically deployed to satisfy organizational interests while responding to community needs
- For PNIN, rigorous participation did not prioritize water due to costs and past experiences

# Conclusion

## Water Supply in Nigeria: Optimism or Pessimism?

- 1. Although there was external pressure on government for water privatization, Yet government did not deliberately promote water privatization.
- Rather, sheer mismanagement, poor water delivery capabilities, and the failure of adequate public water supply influenced people to turn to alternative means. (Regulation came after a fait accompli)
- 2. This has lead to the emerging proliferation of water stations by water entrepreneurs, corporations, and individuals

# 3. Wastage of Resources

- Management problems resulted from poor quality, and waste
- Exorbitant costs of water supply (from the bottled water to private stations, diesel, and power plants showed that only the rich can have access to portable water

# Efforts by government, corporations, and NGOs are rather one of shallow commitment

- To upturn the pessimism and pipedream of water supply, the paper contends that a holistic approach that will take cognizance of watershed management system is an essential step to adequate portable water delivery in Nigeria.
- Generally, there is a willingness to share water costs/sources (very unusual in rural communities)

# Bodo Water Facility, Ogoni

