



SEMINAR

PROGRAMME FOR LAND AND AGRARIAN STUDIES

2nd Floor Main Hall UWC Private Bag x17 Bellville 7535 Tel: +27 21 959 3733 Fax: +27 959 3732 www.plaas.org.za

DATE: Thursday, 8 May 2008

Hydraulic Property Creation and Water Rights in Informal Economies : Promise or Illusion?

by Barbara Nompomulelo Tapela (PLAAS)

Abstract

Access to water by the rural poor is widely recognised as critical to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. Although the South African government has since 1994 instituted water sector reforms that recognise water as a basic human right and aim at achieving fair and equitable access to water, many people living in rural areas remain without adequate or secure access to water. Access problems are compounded by the compartmentalized focus by water policies on allocations of water for basic needs, commercial use and narrowly-defined subsistence levels of production. Effectively, many rural people are left without means of access to water for livelihood strategies that are neither basic, commercial nor 'subsistence', but diverse, blended, dynamic, nested and often informal. Significant numbers of historically disadvantaged rural people also use water above Schedule One definitions, although their total use is less than 10 percent of all water uses and only becomes relatively important during extreme droughts. It is debatable whether the prevailing institutional environment and arrangements can adequately address the informality of water use within the country.

Institutional reforms being adopted by the South African government to manage water allocation reform, supply and demand are Western constructs that do not adequately address the informality of water use in much of the rural space economy. Consequently, most informal water uses by rural people take place outside the ambit of the state in terms of numbers, as direct abstraction, manual abstractions, mechanized abstractions and storage. This presentation examines the concept of 'hydraulic property creation' and explores the opportunities that it presents for resolving challenges of securing access to water for informal use. The argument is that informal investments in water infrastructure by rural people are critical to resolving the challenges associated with insecure access to water and should therefore be given the same measure of support as enjoyed by formal investments.

NEXT SEMINAR: Thursday, 15 May 2008 – Jan Mogoladi (PLAAS)

Social movements and poverty in South Africa: Appreciating insiders' perspectives