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Water governance and the colonial legacy in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to explore how colonialism has had an impact on Zimbabwe's post-independence water governance policies. The dissertation is anchored on the notion of path dependence, which argues that history is an important element to consider when understanding current events and scenarios. Importantly, the dissertation seeks to explore how colonial institutions that were subsequently inherited by the post-independence government effectively perpetuated discriminatory practices. Various pieces of literature have alluded to the uneven and exclusionary measures that composed colonialism. Within this study, it is evident that the laws and institutions that the colonial government introduced were tilted towards serving the minority over the majority, and this was clear in issues concerning land and water. Various laws that were introduced, such as the 1978 Water Act, were only repealed in 1998, 18 years after the demise of the colonial government. This further points to the fact that, for the first 18 years of Zimbabwe's independence, the country was still using the uneven playing field that colonialism had used to build the Rhodesian state. Institutions such as the local government, which served the interests of the minority, would under the post-independence government, be used by the ruling ZANU PF to further its political agenda. In any country, the local government is at the heart of service delivery and the ministry must perform accordingly to ensure that citizens have access to clean running water as well basic service delivery. Challenges arise when these institutions become politicized. The politicization of local government sees the contestation of power, especially when looking at the decentralization of power to local communities. The dissertation does not argue for or against decentralisation but unpacks the various power dynamics and how they impact water governance. Furthermore, the notion that "history matters" continues to appear in how institutions continue to work in almost the same manner as the former colonial institutions. The role of institutions in this dissertation is made evident through the cholera outbreak in 2008, as well as how the Zimbabwean government has sought to address the challenges that climate change poses towards the country's water resources. This further elaborates on the importance of institutions within countries and the role they play in providing water services as this dissertation will discuss.

Keywords: Colonialism, governance, institutions, post-colonialism, path dependence