



# The Social Life of Water Pumps in Africa

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# Theoretical background – ‘why water pumps?’

- Urban Studies: Southern urbanism and heterogeneous infrastructural configurations (Marvin and Graham, 2000; Lawhon et al., 2017)
- Science and Technology Studies (STS): fluid technology, e.g. “The Zimbabwe Bush Pump” (de Laet and Mol, 2000)
- Development Studies: Return of the grand narrative of big ‘D’ Development (Hart, 2001) – infrastructure for building sustainable, inclusive, resilient societies (SDG 9) – where is the analytical place for the ‘informal; spontaneous; and appropriate technology’ such as water pumps?

# The question

- How does infrastructure 'at the edge of official Development intervention' shape, and how is it shaped by, social and material processes?
- In other words, what do water pumps do to people's everyday lives?

# Climate change adaptation intervention and water pumps

Case Ghana

# Dry season farming

- “One Village, One Dam” – the modernist infrastructure ideal by the central government
- This creates those who can access to the formal infrastructure and who cannot
- Who cannot however learn from the experience
- Spontaneous irrigation – individual farmer-led investment





# The water pump has

- made individual farmers innovative, reflexive – learns from own investment
- revealed limited collective arrangement (due to unwillingness to pay for the fuel)

# Land acquisition and water pumps

Case Mozambique

# Multiple land acquisitions

- Resettlement communities are in negotiation with neighbouring communities and their farmer Association for farmland allocation
- The neighbouring communities had experiences in negotiating with the sugar investor who provided them with water pumps
- The water pumps are broken due to floods – while the sugar company receded
- The landed communities urge the resettlement community to bring water pumps to share their farmland



# The water pump has

- become the central point of land negotiations;
- also simultaneously become a source of grievances; and a lack of support for the repair, maintenance of simple objects such as water pumps
- revealed multi-layered interactions (and lack thereof) between individuals, communities, and intervening parties (incl. investors)

# Concluding: The social life of water pumps

- “The social life of things” involves commodification (Appadurai, 1986)  
– fuel, commercialized produce, negotiable land ‘properties’
- Arguing for the micro-assessment of farmer-led ‘accumulation’ in relation to the macro-process of capital accumulation
- Following water pumps reveals various interactions, negotiation possibilities that are otherwise invisible from the official Development process