

Culture and Values Approach for Shared Water Course Institutions in SADC

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Understanding the world through Culture and Values

- Understanding the world through culture and values:
 - Holistic approach
 - Multi-dimensional understanding of all societies (groups of people)
- **DO NOT** ask what is 'real' or whether something can be proven scientifically
- **RATHER, ASK** what is the impact of something on a person's life



The underlying assumptions:

1. Culture and values has impact on:
 - how individuals think and feel;
 - what people consider important;
 - how people make decisions, behave and negotiate;
 - what people will view as a useful or acceptable solutions to a challenge.
2. Culture is time, space and context specific.
 - Thus: cultural dynamics, both internally (between members) and externally (in terms of the local or regional context within which the organisation has mandate to act), will differ from organisation to organisation.
 - Thus: culture cannot be assumed to be a homogenous reality, but rather needs to be addressed as a unique dynamic from organisation to organisation.



Cultures and Values in terms of river basins and RBOs:

We argue:

Not enough attention has been placed on factoring in local social and cultural configurations into institutional processes of management of RBOs.

We propose: a culturally embedded approach to river basin management



Cultures and Values in terms of river basins and RBOs

- Transboundary waters traverse different kinds of borders
 - National (provincial, local)
 - Cultural (traditional)
 - Environmental
 - Historical, etc.
- As such, river basins are embedded within various contexts.
- For the Culture and Values Approach the following contexts are of prime importance:
 - Socio-cultural
 - Historical
 - Political



Important concepts to consider:

- Cultural Relativity

Cultural relativism also necessitates personal reflexivity about one's own positioning as actor on the cultural stage by highlighting the fact that the way we view (and thus also understand) something is not absolute and is influenced by our own culture, context and experiences.



Important concepts to consider:

- Cultural Relativity
- Representing the 'other'

Important questions that emerge:

- ❖ How do we construct representations of others?
- ❖ Are we aware of the power relationship involved in the 'othering' process?
- ❖ In terms of cultural representation, who has the right to speak for someone else?



Important concepts to consider:

- Cultural Relativity
- Representing the 'other'
- Polyvocality

Why a poly-vocal approach?

Because the inclusion of multiple voices:

- ❖ Facilitates the co-creation of meaning
- ❖ Fosters a sense of belonging and buy-in by those on the periphery. For example, by allowing for documenting the issues/stories of women, minorities, or any individual outside the power base and centre of decision-making
- ❖ Creates space for alternative ways of sharing knowledge, for example oral history



Important concepts to consider:

- Cultural Relativity
- Representing the 'other'
- Polyvocality
- Embedded wisdom

Think about: The cultural and spiritual life of water in Southern Africa



For RBOs this approach works at two levels:

- Community living in the basin
 - Buy-in and belonging
 - Multiple contexts to deal with
- River basin operation
 - Operational practices
 - Contextually embedded individuals



Culture and Values Approach in practice:

- Decision-making
- Cultural diversity mainstreaming
- Public participation
- Social and inter-cultural learning
- Knowledge dissemination
- Daily operational activities of an RBO



How can this approach help RBOs?

- Generates understanding of the construction and resultant consequences of the collective imagination at work in and around river basins
- Creates space for multiple voices
- Facilitates ‘buy-in’ from local communities and stakeholders
- Offers the opportunity to incorporate different kinds of knowledge in problem solving processes
- Helps mainstream issues of cultural diversity



How can this approach help RBOs? Everyday practices:

Think about:

Power relationships within a meeting and its affect on creating equal room for different voices.

- Who sets up the agenda?
- Who has opportunity to influence the agenda?
- Who is the chairperson?
- Who are given time to air their views?
- Where is the meeting being held and who has easy access to this meeting place?



The Culture and Values approach also forms an integral part to the other tools presented at this workshop, for example:

Visioning:

- Have we consulted broadly with the stakeholders that fall directly and indirectly within the ambit of the potential process?
- Has an arena been created where communities feel secure enough to express their dreams and criticise existing initiatives?
- Have we allowed the vision to emerge within a poly-vocal setting where no one set of ideals or opinions is being sidelined?

Thank you

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