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## Drinking Water Policy, Water Rights and Allocation Practice in Rural Northern Ghana

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### Abstract

Present international drinking water policy dictates communal management of improved rural water supply facilities, such as hand pump fitted boreholes, to guarantee their technical sustainability and better access to water. Ghana has adopted and implemented that approach countrywide in its National Community Water and Sanitation Program.

Some concepts, which the NCWSP policy suggests, contradict both former local water right regime and local perceptions of water. Among them are water tariff, formal user community and rights to exclude others from access. Pump communities are challenged to balance and deal with project legislation and borehole management guidelines deriving from water policy, as well as with socio-cultural norms, ecological circumstances and practical needs, which all embody divergent management priorities and request for different norms applied in such management.

What empirical impact has the international drinking water approach on the local management of household water? What institutional and conceptual changes have emerged in comparison with the former water right regime? And what are the consequences for the access to water and local water allocation practice?

The drinking water policy implemented in rural Ghana has provoked major changes in the local household management regime. The formal membership in bounded user communities, which hold a monopoly on property, use and decision-making rights for the facility, was introduced. The regular payment of money for rural water supply was extended to all regions. Pump communities got encouraged to sanction non-payment with the exclusion from access. But crafted institutions were negotiated on local level to balance contradictions between them and the former water right regime. Non-members of formal user communities may obtain use rights, which limit the amount of water, the water use and the withdrawal time. Payments were conceptualised as maintenance fees not as water tariffs. And additional rules and the close linkage of property and use rights prevent the exclusion of users due to non-payment. Despite new conceptual design and diversification of water rights and rules, water allocation practice does not show major changes but rather depends on non-normative factors.

**Keywords:** Communal management, household water, water rights