



# Volumes of Water, Inequalities and Heritage Loss at Zimbabwe's Tugwi-Mukosi Dam

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## Abstract

This study examines the socio-ecological impacts of the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam on rural communities in Masvingo South, Zimbabwe, focusing on how dam construction has disrupted and "silenced" traditional water resource values, undermining socio-ecological well-being. Taking a critical community psychology approach, it highlights how ignoring rivers' roles as heritage sites hampers collaborative water management and sustainable development. Using qualitative data from interviews with locals and stakeholders, the study shows how the dam exacerbates social inequalities and heritage decay. It calls for integrating local values into dam planning to honor rivers' cultural significance. By addressing opposition to the dam and prioritizing community engagement, the research advocates for transformative water management that respects heritage and fosters socio-ecological well-being.

## Policy Recommendations

- **Inclusive Water Governance:** Implement community-based governance structures that align water management with local sociocultural values traditionally associated with rivers as heritage sites.
- **Policy Integration of Socio-Ecological Well-Being:** Prioritize socio-ecological well-being in dam policies, safeguarding equitable access, respecting local heritage in water use, and drawing on traditional knowledge and values.
- **Community Empowerment Initiatives:** Support ecotourism, agriculture and local businesses that utilize dam resources to foster economic inclusion, while preserving the spirit of heritage that has historically been tied to rivers.

## KEYWORDS

socio-ecological well-being  
traditional (river) knowledge  
damming / de-damming  
water resource management  
sustainable development

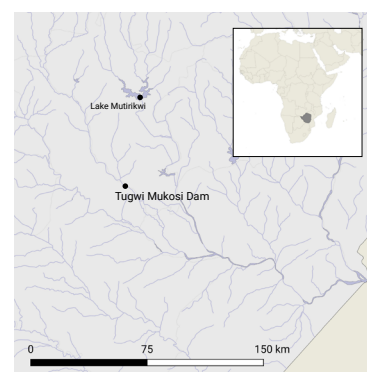
## WATER VALUES



## CLIMATE



**BSh:** Hot semi-arid climate



< Fig. 1 Aerial view of the area flooded after the creation of the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam (Source: Tariro Mangena, 2017. CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons).



## **Introduction**

Dams have long been lauded for their contribution to economic and infrastructural development, yet large-scale projects in the Global South, especially in rural, culturally rich communities, often have complex socio-ecological consequences (Ostrom 1990; (Martínez-Santos, Aldaya and Llamas 2014). Damming is widely endorsed as a strategy to address water and energy needs, promising long-term benefits like job creation and industrial growth, as well as opportunities for economic activities such as water exportation, tourism and fisheries (IHA 2011; World Commission on Dams 2000; Tortajada 2014). While dam projects can be justified for their promise of economic development, in many cases, they fail to incorporate or benefit local communities, prompting loss of ecological and social values with limited economic advantage, exacerbating inequalities and disrupting communal ties to natural resources (Bond and Manyanya 2002; Mapuranga 2016). Particularly in the Global South, dams often prioritize state or elite interests over local needs, undermining the ecological and cultural role played by water resources (Goldsmith and Hildyard 1984).

In Zimbabwe, politicians and water engineers are the ones who mostly see and consider dams as essential and beneficial for the socioeconomic advancement of communities, contributing to income generation, irrigation, electricity, flood control and infrastructure development (Canter 1985; Tapfumaneyi 2014). This is particularly true in rural areas, where dam projects are viewed by national government officials as supportive of agriculture and local entrepreneurial activities, thereby helping to alleviate poverty as long as water resources remain accessible (Mudzengi 2012; Chazireni and Chigonda 2018). However, research indicates that many dam projects in Zimbabwe,

despite their potential, fall short in delivering equitable economic benefits, since limitations in public participation and institutional support hinder local involvement in the planning and designing of the dam (Bond and Manyanya 2002). Zimbabwe's rural communities, who face vulnerabilities from climate change and water scarcity, depend on local water sources, especially rivers, which people regard as central to their livelihoods and heritage. River water is used for gardens, and it is along rivers that rain-making ceremonies and cleansing rites take place (Mudzengi 2012; Nhodo 2019).

This article examines how the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam in Masvingo South, Zimbabwe, has impacted local communities by disrupting their socio-ecological well-being and cultural connections to rivers as sacred heritage sites. Using a critical community psychology (CCP) framework, which emphasizes social justice and ecological interconnectedness (Arcidiacono and Di Martino 2016), the study analyzes the socio-ecological dissonance that emerges when development projects overlook local knowledge and heritage values. CCP, which has not been widely applied in studies of damming projects, underscores the importance of incorporating local cultural knowledge in water resource management. The study suggests that preserving rivers' cultural significance can help maintain socio-ecological well-being in a world increasingly affected by climate change.

## **The Case of Tugwi-Mukosi Dam – Lessons and Implications for Current Research**

The Tugwi-Mukosi Dam, which lies 72 km south of Masvingo Town and covers 35 km<sup>2</sup> with a capacity of 1.8 billion m<sup>3</sup> (fig. 1), serves as a compelling case of how modern development can displace historical, community-driven wa-

ter management practices (Chendume and Tarisayi 2023). In 1955 the colonial government proposed building the dam, which would sit at the confluence of the Tugwi and Mukosi rivers. Following the creation of Lake Kariba, the Rhodesian “green revolution” mantra led to the construction of dams like Kyle (now Mutirukwi), McIlwaine (Chivero) and eventually the Tugwi-Mukosi, which was inherited by the post-colonial government as an unfinished endeavor (Tapfumaneyi 2014; Nhodo 2019).

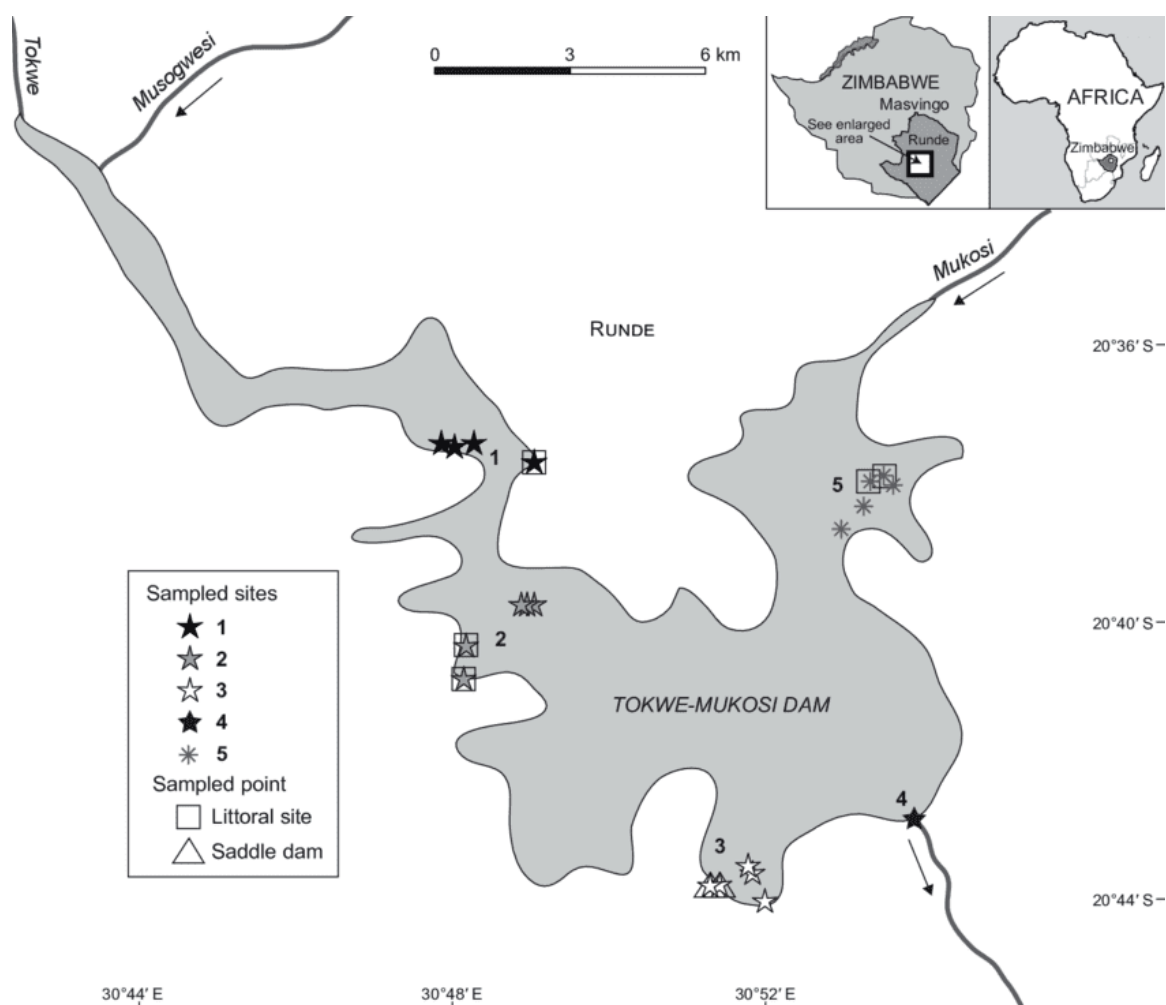
From the time of the project’s inception, about six decades ago, there was no official policy or strategic plan to guide the execution of the project – not even a resettlement plan or well-stipulated development plan. Nor was there any agreement that incorporated the voices and insights of the communities that inhabited the site. It was only years later, when the project was almost completed, that the postcolonial government started drafting a “master plan,” which has yet to be approved or fully executed (Mudefi, Kwizera and Akpan 2025); Nhodo 2019). The overarching goal of the Master Plan was to consolidate the dam project into a coherent framework for regional development by coordinating water management, irrigation, hydropower generation, resettlement and economic activities around the reservoir. Conceived largely in technocratic and economic terms, the plan sought to maximize the dam’s utility for national development while addressing the social and environmental disruptions caused by its construction (Nhodo 2019).

This developmental orientation also raises critical questions about how cultural heritage was understood, valued, or sidelined within the planning process. In particular, the Master Plan intersects with heritage because it reconfigures landscapes, livelihoods and riverine spaces that were historically embedded in local cultur-

al practices and meanings. The Tugwi-Mukosi Dam significantly impacted communities traditionally connected to the Tugwi and Mukosi rivers as heritage sites. As such, the planning framework not only reshaped physical space but also transformed culturally significant environments, challenging existing relationships between communities, ancestral lands and sacred waterways. As Zimbabwe’s largest inland water reservoir, the dam was intended to be transformative. However, its construction faced prolonged delays and challenges. These stemmed from a variety of factors, including Rhodesia’s unilateral declaration of independence, Zimbabwe’s liberation war until 1980 and the 1998 currency devaluation (Mudzengi 2012).

The post-independence government, which has been in power since the nation gained its independence in 1980, constructed the dam primarily to supply water for hydroelectric power generation and irrigation purposes, particularly for the cultivation of sugar cane, with the potential to support citrus plantations, ecotourism, fisheries and aquaculture. However, since these businesses are capital-intensive and local communities cannot afford such large investments, the construction of the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam worsened socioeconomic inequalities and ecological injustice in the region (Tapfumaneyi 2014; Nhodo 2019; Matunhu 2021). In addition, the dam’s construction has led to the relocation of thousands of residents and fractured socio-cultural and ecological connections.

Although the dam was expected to drive agricultural growth and economic expansion, the dam’s benefits primarily favor external actors, who are mostly the private business and political elites from the country’s major cities, leaving local communities bearing the socio-ecological costs (Bote 2014; Nhodo 2019).



^ Fig. 2 Diagram of the Diagram of the Tugwi-Mukosi (Tokwe-Mukosi) Dam (Source: Mhlanga et al., 2020).

Mushawasha, Chiredzi, Chivi and several sections of Masvingo district are among the places impacted by the enormous dam building and the ensuing flooding. The postcolonial government planned to relocate villagers in three stages, adhering to a technical method of determining the order and timing. Between 2013 and 2014, 3,268 people living in flood-prone areas were relocated to a buffer zone, liberating the space around the dam to further reinforce the dam; this meant that people who had invested work and finances into houses, lost their invest-

ment and their homes, as the government didn't provide housing (Nhodo 2019). While relocation removed households from immediate flood risk, it simultaneously imposed significant social and economic harm as many displaced residents lost homes they had built over decades. The impact was more severe among elderly residents who lacked the capacity and resources to rebuild their lives elsewhere.

Despite the vague planning, very little was done to meet the predicted relocation numbers since

the Zimbabwean government lacked the necessary means to relocate and compensate the impacted villagers. Then, in 2014, rising water in the dam due to incessant rains which pounded the province for some weeks spilled over the uncompleted dam wall, resulting in the severe flooding of several communities (the ones that were not relocated earlier), especially in the southern part of the district of Chivi. Livestock, infrastructure, agricultural initiatives and human lives were all threatened. In a palliative measure by the government, the impacted residents were forcibly relocated to the “inhabitable” Mufula, Chisase, Chingwizi and Masangula sections of Mwenezi Rural District about 60 km away (Tapfumaneyi 2014; Nhodo 2019).

Relocated villagers were held in camps, where conditions, especially in Chingwizi transit camp, have been appalling. They were later allocated 1 ha plots on land adjacent to the camp which was acquired from the Mwenezi Development Trust which owned it. The administration continues to lack the necessary resources to move people from the camps to their new areas (both the so-called buffer zones and the inhabitable ones) – as well as to provide daily essentials. The victims’ perception of the holding camps as being significantly superior to the new plots that the government assigned them has made matters worse. The villagers have been opposing the transfer from the transit camps to the assigned plots as a result. This has undoubtedly resulted in one of the most severe humanitarian disasters the Zimbabwean government has faced since gaining independence (Mudzengi 2012; Nhodo 2019; Matunhu 2021).

## Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine the lived experiences of com-

munities affected by the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam, including both displaced residents and those who remained near the new dam. Through purposive sampling, 20 households were selected, evenly split between upstream and downstream locations (10 households each). Additional key informants were interviewed, including:

- 2 local chiefs
- 4 village heads
- 2 faith leaders
- 2 representatives from community-based groups
- 4 resident women
- 4 resident men
- 2 youth representatives

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed patterns of social and ecological disconnection, economic exclusion and erosion of cultural values, particularly regarding water resources and rivers as traditional heritage sites (Boelens et al. 2016). This qualitative research design is well-suited for investigating socio-ecological dissonance caused by development projects that disregard local knowledge and heritage values. The approach prioritizes the lived experiences of affected individuals, capturing nuanced impacts of displacement and proximity to the dam on people’s social, ecological and cultural ties. Thematic analysis is particularly effective, offering context-specific insights that quantitative methods might overlook. By exploring the intersection of social and ecological dimensions, the design highlights the complex relationships between communities, heritage and water resources.

## Results: Analysis and Discussion

The study of the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam reveals substantial geopolitical challenges and entrenched

community opposition to the dam project as highlighted by the following respondent:

My ancestors' graves are now buried under! We used to perform our cultural rights there. We were not given time and resources to exhume their remains! How now can we appease them now that they are submerged under water? (Interview with Chief Nyajena at his homestead on 14 June 2023).

One elderly resident in Ward 31 of Masvingo Rural District lamented:

We used to fish at the confluence of Tugwi and Mukosi rivers. The revenue we got from the fish supplemented our family incomes! That is history now since the commissioning of the dam since we are not allowed to fish from the dam by the National Parks. For one to fish from the dam now, one has to apply for a permit! (Interview on 23 June 2023).

Yet one respondent in the Chingwizi area where those people who were relocated to pave way for the dam's construction bitterly complained in an interview at his homestead on 29 June 2023 at Nyuni Clinic:

When we were taken to this place by the government, we were promised irrigation plots on the other side of the railway line from Ngundu to Chiredzi you see over there! It is now almost a decade now and nothing has been done for us! Our fear now is that if the irrigation project materializes, it will benefit outsiders from as far as the capital city!

These sentiments are based on the reflective, practical experience of both the relocated communities and those who remained closer to the dam, who now know, in various ways, about the aftermaths of the new dam, which was con-

structed without considering the sociocultural and ecological realities of local communities, who have historical ties to rivers, perceiving them as local heritage sites.

This local resistance is fueled by a history of exclusion and disruption, where dam projects in Zimbabwe – including the colonial-era Kari-ba Dam and postcolonial projects like Osborne and Tugwi-Mukosi – have displaced thousands of people, undermining their social, cultural and economic well-being (Bote 2014; Chazireni and Chigonda 2018; Nhodo 2019). Such displacement has severed communities from their traditional rivers, breaking a legacy of heritage-based relationships with these waterways and perpetuating socioeconomic insecurity due to inadequate legal protections (Nhodo 2019).

In our analysis of the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam through the lens of the CCP framework, several themes emerged as especially important: social justice, ecological interconnectedness, an ethics of reciprocity, care and responsibility. These themes provided a framework to contextualize the displacement of a number of people from traditional river sites that they looked up to as their endowed heritage and who now face economic deprivation and limited security on 1 ha plots. The injustice here is both socioeconomic and ecological, as people have been removed from landscapes that supported sustainable practices, social bonds and a balanced relationship with the environment. For example, the resettlement into Chingwizi Transit camp, where conditions were insufficient, demonstrates a lack of care and responsibility on the part of governing entities, whose obligations toward displaced populations were neglected, highlighting an ethical shortfall that has only intensified community resentment. This notion has remained a matter of debate among scholars, with the government reporting from around 2014–16 that

disease, child neglect and sexual abuse somewhat improved after a \$1 million donation from the government of Japan (Nhodo 2019).

### **Social and Ecological Disconnection**

Local communities surrounding the Tugwi-Mukosi expressed opposition to the dam, voicing concerns about their diminished access to natural resources such as rivers and disrupted cultural practices that are often tied to them. The CCP framework reveals this resistance as grounded in a broader ethics of reciprocity, where communities recognize rivers not merely as resources but as cultural and ecological assets that necessitate mutual respect and care. It further reveals that what can be described as communities' resistance is not simply opposition to local inconvenience but is connected to broader issues of justice and equitable access to natural resources (local rivers). If values attached to local rivers are not prioritized or are somehow silenced in development plans, socio-economic disparities will persist, further damaging community welfare and undermining efforts to achieve inclusive development. As one male elder in Ward 28 of Chivi Rural District observed:

They brought us water, but they took away our soul, we cannot enjoy using the water as we did in the rivers. If only we could be allowed to use the dam as we did in the rivers that we have been forcibly moved away from, then this dam could be a development to celebrate (Key Informant Interview held on 23 June 2023).

The above statement demonstrates that the dam's effects are not simply material but have a profound impact on social identity that is aligned with rivers (Bote 2014; Mudefi et al.

2025; Nhodo 2019). For younger generations, whose cultural practices have been interrupted, the dam symbolizes an erasure of tradition and identity. According to one youth interviewed at Gororo Business Centre on 3 July 2023:

Yes, we see the volumes of water covering our cultural landscape, but what values do we learn from them? I personally don't see why we need this dam, better we have the rivers that God gave to us through our ancestors (FGD held with the youth on 3 July 2023).

This sentiment from a young community member captures a generational expression of disillusionment, disconnection and cultural loss in the face of environmental transformation. It reveals how the dam not only alters the environment but severs the intergenerational transmission of meaning, values and identity – particularly for the youth. The CCP lens here exposes the ethical irresponsibility of a dam project that disrupts not only the ecology of the river but also the social bonds that sustain community well-being and identity. The youth's rhetorical question – “what values do we learn from them?” – points to a fundamental disjuncture between the visible presence of the dam (a literal body of water) and the invisible cultural, spiritual and ecological knowledge systems that rivers once embodied. Unlike ancestral rivers, which were embedded with stories, rituals and ecological teachings passed down through generations, the dam is perceived as devoid of meaning – a cultural void imposed on the landscape (Mudefi et al. 2025; Nhodo 2019).

### **Economic Exclusion**

Economic exclusion, as highlighted by local frustrations over limited access to the dam's

resources, exposes the failure of Tugwi-Mukosi to uphold social justice and reciprocity. Women and youth, who bear the brunt of water scarcity and lack of employment opportunities, describe the dam as an inequitable structure that benefits outsiders while excluding local stakeholders (Nhodo 2019). One woman reflected that “we can see the water, but it’s like it doesn’t belong to us.” In addition to exclusion, respondents noted inequality, with prestigious and powerful men favored most. A female respondent explained:

Powerful men from as far as Harare are the big players in the land market and ownership scheme, not us the poor women who said we don’t need this land, and we cannot use the dam water productively as women? We miss those beautiful life-supporting activities like gardening, which our elderly women taught us to do around nature as women, especially in rivers, just to meet and share our livelihoods stories and challenges as women in a local, ancestral water point. This is sad and so depressing indeed (Interview at her homestead on 3 July 2023).

This sentiment highlights that when the dam’s benefits bypass those most affected, it deepens socioeconomic divides and sociocultural disconnects, thereby disregarding the reciprocity principle that should inform collaborative water management and sustainable development. It is not only the economic exclusion that has resulted in opposition, but the loss of cultural identity and freedom to pursue a livelihood, using an ancestral resource (the rivers) (Chendume and Tarisayi 2023). In addition, opposition has stemmed from a sense of unfulfilled promises and unmet expectations. A resident leader explained at a community meeting at Dare Primary School on 5 July 2023:

We had known that from the planning of this dam project, the government, including both the colonial and postcolonial, promised and pledged to compensate those who will be relocated as the dam is built, and even those who remain closer to the dam for them to benefit from the project economically. But this is not the case here, people are not benefiting at all. No compensation. No livelihood support at all (FGD held with community leaders on 5 July 2023).

### **Erosion of Sociocultural Values**

The dam has fundamentally disrupted traditional practices of river conservation and stewardship, which were previously integral to communities’ cultural heritage and ecological identity. Community leaders lament the replacement of their sustainable practices with top-down management that disregards the cultural significance of rivers. By undermining the sustainable practices, the dam erodes cultural cohesion and continuity (Nhodo 2019; Chendume and Tarisayi 2023). According to one community leader:

Our ancestors taught us to take only what we need, but now the dam’s water flows wastefully, simply because we do not know what the water is used for. If it was still the water flowing in our beautiful rivers, we could continue using it the way our ancestors taught us. But now, we don’t know what we should do with all this water we see with our eyes and never touch with our hands (Interview at a community meeting at Dare Primary School on 5 July 2023).

The discord between indigenous practices grounded in ethical restraint and a dam infrastructure that operates without regard for cul-

tural continuity or ecological balance was also highlighted by another respondent:

I think if we were asked about our view about bringing this dam project to us, we couldn't have allowed it to be installed, since we could not move with our traditional values and practices into the new project. It's so painful. We have lost our wisdom, tradition and heritage we enjoyed before we were moved away from the two rivers (Interview with a local headman at his homestead on 6 July 2023).

Moreover, a female resident described Chingwizi as a largely uninhabitable settlement: very hot and dry, with "only six functioning boreholes out of the 65 that have been drilled by donors serving the displaced communities." The woman offered a description:

There is completely no life here, for us rural women we traditionally enjoy meeting in water points and share our stories and work together as a community, which was possible when we were closer to our ancestral rivers. Now even the boreholes here are either dry, broken or salty (Interview at Bongo Business Centre on 7 July 2023).

This sentiment offers a powerful window into the intersection of environmental transformation and gendered social structures. The speaker highlights the erosion of both ecological and communal lifeways, particularly as they affect rural women. Traditionally in this region, women have been custodians of natural resources, especially water sources (Nhodo 2019). The speaker laments the absence of "life," a term that goes beyond physical presence to evoke emotional, social and cultural emptiness. Rivers, in this context, are not merely water sources but vital communal and cultural hubs. The

construction of the dam has displaced communities from their ancestral rivers, effectively severing women from these historically and symbolically significant spaces. As cited (Nhodo 2019), women have long been custodians of water sources – responsible for their care, management and use – thus the displacement constitutes a loss of identity, authority and tradition. The speaker's reflection reveals the deep interconnectedness of environment, gender, culture and community. The dam's construction has not only altered landscapes but has also disrupted the social fabric of rural women's lives, stripping them of communal rituals, roles and relational spaces. As such, any development intervention must reckon with these often-overlooked dimensions, ensuring that local women's voices, traditions and ecological (river) knowledge are not sidelined and/or silenced in the name of progress.

From an almost similar stance, an elderly man expressed that after settling in Chingwizi, he lost his son and had to bury him in a non-ancestral land. He explained the implications:

As there are rumors that we are yet to be moved again from this place, it means my dead son will remain here, and this is tearing me apart. Also, when he died, we could not go to our ancestral river to cleanse ourselves as a family as our culture expects us to do. Truly, this colonial or postcolonial dam project is more than a harm to us as families and community. If we had known we could have not embraced it right from when the white men pegged it, while we were watching and doing nothing (Interview at his homestead on 8 July 2023).

This deeply personal and emotionally charged reflection from the elderly man reveals the profound cultural, spiritual and psychological toll

of the dam project on local communities — particularly older generations who serve as custodians of tradition. His sentiment highlights how the dam's impact extends far beyond displacement and economic disruption to affect the very foundations of identity, belonging and intergenerational continuity. It reflects the blow perceived by families, which are being eroded by the dam project. For many African communities, especially in Zimbabwe, ancestral land or even a river is not just physical terrain — it is spiritually sacrosanct (Nhodo 2019). The act of burying his son “in a non-ancestral land” represents a rupture with lineage, continuity and cosmology. The fact that he has no access to the ancestral river as well, both physically and metaphorically, means that his cultural identity and heritage are somehow silenced by the dam project. For an elderly man, whose identity is often interwoven with ancestral legacy, this dislocation undermines not only his role as a father but also his spiritual obligations as an elder and custodian of heritage.

## **Conclusion**

The Tugwi-Mukosi Dam project underscores the dangers of excluding community voices in water management: socio-ecological well-being can be disrupted and ethics of responsibility and care eroded, as communities are moved away from local rivers. The socio-ecological impacts of the dam are closely linked to the marginalization of cultural values associated with rivers. Rethinking the importance of local sentiments and recognizing rivers as heritage sites, while restoring justice, reciprocity and ecological interconnectedness to dam management, could transform these projects from sites of contention into models of collaborative and sustainable development. Rivers should be acknowledged as heritage sites that not only

flow with rainwater but also carry the traditional knowledge and practices of local communities — the same communities which are displaced by dam infrastructure. Members of these communities leave behind the cultural heritage attached to rivers as they relocate.

Life has been especially difficult for the communities relocated to new environments: socioeconomic inequality is rife, promises for compensation are never fulfilled, access to the two major rivers, Tugwi and Mukosi, is very much limited by distance and supporting resources. The relocated communities cannot access the dam water to maintain the sociocultural practices they developed living alongside the two rivers, which are somewhat silenced, mostly as a result of the dam's governance.

In this context, CCP framework offers essential insights for water resource management, demonstrating the value of a community-centered, ethics-based model that respects traditional connections to water (rivers) and cultural heritage. By upholding values like social justice, care and reciprocity, water (river) management policies can advance resilience, promote equity and enable a more harmonious relationship between development and local populations. Creating a socio-ecological space that integrates traditional (river) knowledge would empower communities, preserve heritage values and ensure sustainable, inclusive development in response to ongoing environmental challenges.

The construction of the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam has left a legacy of unfulfilled promises and unmet expectations, underscored by politico-economic missteps, sociocultural disconnection with the two major rivers and socio-ecological collapse of the community system. Initiated nearly six decades ago under colonial rule and carried forward by the post-independence government,

the project remains a “hard-to-celebrate” accomplishment.

The vagueness and ambiguity of the protocol and legislative frameworks governing the project have persisted since its inception, with critical issues such as resettlement plans for affected communities left inadequately addressed. The so-called master plan, referenced by local authorities and stakeholders, was drafted only after the displacement and relocation of communities and is still under review to this day, failing to provide concrete, actionable steps required for sustainable development that caters for the value of the rivers to the displaced communities as well. This protracted history underscores the enduring consequences of inadequately planned political and economic development initiatives, illustrating the deep scars left on affected communities and ecosystems, especially their ties with local rivers. The construction of the dam was meant to be for the good of the nation, and needed more methodological implementation and attention to how it would impact the region's traditional residents and the locally revered rivers, that embody the somewhat “silenced” sociocultural heritage of the displaced communities. In light of these deep socio-ecological scars and cultural dislocations wrought by the Tugwi-Mukosi Dam, we conclude by asking:

Should the stakeholders in the Global South continue to hold to the paradigm of damming, or is it time to envision de-damming as a transformative path toward restoring river-based heritage and knowledge, addressing inequality and fostering sustainable, community-driven or heritage-based water governance? Or, rather say, in light of the growing recognition of rivers as living entities with rights, can de-damming be seen not merely as ecological restoration but as a moral and reparative act – one that

revives submerged indigenous identities, heals intergenerational environmental injustices and reclaims the river-based spiritual, cultural and historical memory lost to mega-dam projects like Tugwi-Mukosi?

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