

# Understanding community water governance: What shapes local decision-making and what are the outcomes?

**Name of Authors:** Kirsty Holstead, Shona Russell and Kerry Waylen

**Affiliations:** University of St Andrews and The James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen.

**Email:** Kh38@st-andrews.ac.uk

**Find out more:** [http://www.hydronationscholars.scot/scholar\\_bio\\_Kirsty\\_Holstead.html](http://www.hydronationscholars.scot/scholar_bio_Kirsty_Holstead.html)



## Introduction

**What do you think of when you hear the words 'community water governance' (CWG)?** There is a lack of conceptual clarity around the term. Different conceptions of community, water and governance are all in use (ranging from community ownership to increasing involvement in decision-making, engaging with different water issues - water quantity, quality, access, accessibility, energy production and sanitation, and with diverse ideas about what a 'community' is). However, CWG is defined, it is usually presumed in policy and academia conversations to lead to sustainable and equitable outcomes.

But there is rarely any reflection about the underlying assumptions, expectations and implications of CWG. This project responds to this challenge. It critically engages with 'CWG' to understand how and why people (come together to) play a role in managing water. It also looks at its outcomes and considers how a closer engagement with water can impact water, people and their relationships.

## Methods

The project responds to the following questions:

- Why do people engage in water governance?
- What are the outcomes of this way of organising?
- What are the opportunities and limits of CWG?
- What kinds of waters do 'communities' aim to govern?
- How can playing a role in water management affect relationships around water?
- What are the implications of CWG for Scotland?

This project will take a mixed methods approach using qualitative and quantitative methods which may include: interviews; focus groups; questionnaires; document analysis and ethnography.

Year 1 will involve refining the research questions by engaging with literature across disciplines. A full year of fieldwork will follow in year 2, preceded by data analysis and writing up in years 3 and 4.

## Planned results

- ✓ A conceptual model that draws together findings across disciplines to aid understandings of community water governance;
- ✓ An analysis of the limits and opportunities of community water governance;
- ✓ An evaluation of the factors that influence community water governance;
- ✓ The identification of research gaps and suggestions about a future research agenda in the field;
- ✓ Research findings that make a valuable contribution to water policy and practice in Scotland;
- ✓ Three academic papers which will cover different aspects of the research, as well as blog pieces and a policy brief.

## Future and next steps

Diverse disciplines have already made important contributions to understanding aspects of CWG and many societies have traditions of local level decision-making and water management. But this knowledge is spread thin and wide: CWG is under-conceptualised and there is little coherence in the literature. For this reason, the first step is to conduct an extensive review to ask - what do we already know about CWG?

The dissemination and engagement of the PhD research and its results will be directed towards academic and non-academic stakeholders and users including academic forums such as The Royal Geographical Society and non-academic forums such as The Conversation.



Kirsty gathering data on the impacts of flooding in El Salvador, 2011.

**Acknowledgements:** This research is funded by the Scottish Government's Hydro Nation Scholars Programme.



University of  
St Andrews



The James  
Hutton  
Institute