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## Geneva Water Hub - Research Network Consolidating Grants Recipient Info Sheet

# **“The Everyday Politics of Participatory Water Governance: Cooperation and Conflict in Community Management”**



### Background

Dr Ellie Chowns is a Research Associate at the University of Sheffield. Dr Chowns worked for over ten years for various international development NGOs, including Concern Universal and Christian Aid, before moving into academia at the University of Birmingham and now the University of Sheffield.

### Scientific Interest

Dr Chowns’s research on participatory water governance examines the way that community management works at village level in sub-Saharan Africa, and analyses its impacts in terms of both efficiency and empowerment. Her wider interest is in whether and how collective action can complement formal public service provision.

### Grant Project Description

Community management is the dominant model of water governance in most low-income countries. It is commonly claimed to be more efficient and effective, and more empowering and equitable, than alternatives. However, fieldwork in Malawi suggests that community management is often characterized as much by conflict (especially over finance) as by cooperation at community level. It appears that community management tends to erode trust and reinforce existing inequalities, as well as institutionalising the state’s abdication of responsibility for public service provision. This project will develop this critique, and conduct a systematic review of the literature on participatory water governance.

### Grant Project Quote

“Does participatory water governance work? Not nearly as well as was hoped...”