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“A Gift from God”: Gender and the Feminist Ethnography of Water in Three Trinidadian Communities

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Abstract

Water is abundant in Trinidad, but only 14% of the population receives piped water to their homes seven days a week for 24 hours a day. The rest struggle to meet their water needs through a number of strategies ranging from simple rainwater collection tanks to locally engineered dams. This article has three objectives: 1) to report on a preliminary ethnographic study of water acquisition and management processes in three Trinidadian communities, examining the impact of gender ideologies as a key component in the decisions, work patterns, values and meanings associated with water; 2) to situate the study within the larger research project, ‘Women, Gender and Water’ organized by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI St. Augustine; 3) to explore the nexus among international, national and local water discourses examining overlap and divergences among UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), national water policy and local processes at the village level. Conclusions point to the centrality of gender

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analysis to any policy recommendations that seek to improve the water problem in Trinidad and Tobago, arguing that effective public policy is more likely to result if policymakers understand the gendered, cultural meanings of people's behaviour.
