A Desktop study on the Cultural and Religious uses of water

using regional case studies from South Africa

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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**SECTION ONE:**

1.1. Background and introduction  
1.2. Social Assessment and Development Framework (SAADF)  
1.3. Terms of reference  
1.4. Research methodology

**SECTION TWO:**

2.0. Introduction  
2.1. Overview of relevant legislation  
   - 2.1.3. National Water Strategy (Draft 1, August 2002)  

**SECTION THREE:**

3.1. Introduction to religion and culture  
   - 3.1.1. Definitions of religion  
   - 3.1.2. Definition of culture  
   - 3.1.3. Functions of culture in society  
   - 3.1.4. Culture and religion in South Africa  
   - 3.1.5. The African and Western worldview

**SECTION FOUR:**

4.1. Response to terms of reference  
   - 4.1.1. Identifying cultural and religious uses of water: Common practices  
   - 4.1.2. The extent/scale of cultural and religious uses of water  
   - 4.1.3. The impact of the uses on the water resources  
   - 4.1.4. The impact on the water users if these uses are affected negatively  
4.2. Effective water management; some considerations
4.3. Policy issues

5. Conclusion
SECTION ONE

1.1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Water resource management and development are central to responsible socio-economic growth and poverty reduction. The debate around culture and development has been stimulated by a growing awareness that development programmes fail to consider the cultural environment and cultural factors influencing their sustainability. An added dimension to this is the issue of cultural rights and the recognition that people’s cultural identity, beliefs and values can be a powerful ally as well as a barrier to development or poverty reduction.

Water plays a central role in many religions and beliefs in South Africa. Communities and indigenous peoples have assigned religious and cultural values to water for generations – it is a key element in cultural ceremonies and religious rites. Many rural communities are linked to water for both physical and spiritual health. Traditional management practices often reflect these socially determined norms for water allocation and sustainable practices. This phenomenon is not unique to South Africa; the value of water to the human spirit has been celebrated throughout the history of the world.

The National Water Act (36 of 1998) promotes equitable, efficient and social use of the nation water resources. However, there is still very limited understanding on the use of water for cultural and religious activities and the value(s) attached to these uses and the manner in which these affect management decisions. Recognizing cultural and religious activities of communities can be powerful drivers for social or economic growth and engender a sense of cultural identity and self-confidence, all of which have a positive impact on the development and/or well-being of a community.

Water represents many values to society and it contributes to a complex system of services. Social services provided by water include water for basic human need, for recreation, for cultural and religious activities. Each of these services should be understood and valued differently where necessary. Understanding the complex totality of these values is an important element in integrated water resources management. Likewise identifying the manner in which specific values, attitudes, beliefs and practices affect state and water management strategies is obviously very useful for the design and the implementation of such management systems.

Sustainable Development currently prioritizes poverty reduction, health, and gender as urgent issues. However, sustainable development through the use of water for social and economic development is not only about ensuring that people have access to water and sanitation but that they have a good quality of life where their cultures and values are respected and enhanced. Hence, cultural values and beliefs also directly affect the institutions involved in water
management, particularly water management associations and water committees.

The principle of “integrated management” is a key principle for sustainable development. Within the framework of water resource management, the integration of cultural and religious values in a water management framework is necessary for conservation of water resources. The department can use this opportunity to engage communities, and in this way, religious and traditional sustainability tools and management skills could be put into use, and partnerships could be initiated between the department and these communities.

However, the religious and cultural uses of water are poorly understood in the South African context. To bridge this information gap this report provides a brief synthesis of the common cultural and religious uses of water of various cultural and religious belief systems in South Africa by drawing examples collected from selected regions. If applied appropriately, this could be used to encourage and promote more sustainable approaches in future water related policies, programs and projects.

1.2. Social Assessment and Development Framework (SAADF)

A Social Assessment and Development Framework is currently been prepared for the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. The framework will assist DWAF to ensure that the social component of sustainable development is adequately assessed and incorporated into all decisions affecting the management and the use of South Africa’s scarcest critical resource, namely water\(^1\). In doing so the SAAD Framework also enables DWAF to meet its mandate as set out in the Constitution, National Water Act, Water Service Act, National Environmental Management Act and other relevant legislation\(^2\).

The SAAD Framework aims to encourage an approach to management that recognizes opportunities and challenges associated with development, and offer a set of tools that can be used to promote sustainable development, equity, community development, empowerment, capacity building and the development of social capital\(^3\). During the development of the SAAD Framework (DWAF and researchers) found that no research has been done on how water is used and valued by cultural and religious groups. This information gap developed uncertainty around typical social issues that are likely to be encountered during development projects, so a Desktop study was commissioned to conduct research and improve DWAF’s knowledge on how culture and religion may influence water management in South Africa.

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1.3. Terms of Reference
The Environmental Evaluation Unit (EEU) of the University of Cape Town was appointed by the Unit Stakeholder Empowerment of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) to compile a desktop study on the Cultural and Religious uses of water in South Africa. The study is a small sub-component of the broader Social and Assessment and Development Framework (SAADF) that is currently been prepared for DWAF (see 1.2).

The study on the cultural and religious uses of water aims at collecting information to determine the extent at which communities use water for cultural and religious purposes. Based on the findings of this study, the information collected can be used to inform the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry if there is a need for a more detailed study.

As required by the terms of reference, the desktop study will address the following:

- identify cultural and religious uses of water;
- determine the extent/scale of such use;
- discuss the impact of such uses on the water resources;
- determine the value attached to these uses and the role of such uses on socio-economic structure;
- examine the impact on communities if these uses are affected negatively; and
- determine the need to develop a policy that promotes the recognition of these uses

1.4. Research methodology
The study adopted two research methodologies. The first method was based on literature review. Library material and material from the internet were used as sources of information. The aim of the literature review was to get the insights and perspectives that have been brought by the Judeo-Christian, Eastern and African traditional religious traditions in understanding the use of water as a cultural and religious resource. The second methodology was based on case studies. Three pilot research areas were randomly selected in three provinces. The pilot sites were in Thohoyandou in the Limpopo province, Durban in KwaZuluNatal province and Bhisho in the Eastern Cape province. The site visits involved observing during Water User Associations’ meetings and workshoping the participants on the aims of the study, getting feedback from the participants, interviewing individual members of these associations, studying their constitutions, understanding who constitutes these associations in terms of gender, age group, activities and other social groupings. Meetings were held with different religious organizations in KZN and some traditional leaders in the Eastern Cape to discuss religious and cultural uses of water within their organizations and in their constituencies.
SECTION TWO

2.0. INTRODUCTION
Before addressing the terms of reference for the study it is important to briefly
give the legal context of water management in South Africa. One of the key
elements which guides water management in South Africa is that the national
government (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry), act as the custodian of
the nation’s water resources (National Water Act, Act 36 of 1998).

2.1. OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION
South Africa is a country where water resources are scarce and increasingly
under pressure. In order to improve living standards, access to water is
fundamental and the resource will have to be used efficiently and wisely if we
wish to build a sustainable future. In order to do this, provisions for improved and
more equitable access to water for the nation is essential (including cultural and
religious communities). South Africa’s water legislation affords the opportunity to
the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) to gather information that
is needed for optimal management of our water resources.

Chapter 2 (Bill of Rights) of the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996)
section 31 (1a) states: “Persons belonging to cultural, religious or linguistic
community may not be denied the right, with other members of the community –
to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their language.”

The fundamental principle that guides the National Water Act is that “water is a
national resource, owned by the people of South Africa and held in custodianship
by the state” (National Water Act, 1998 S(3)). This principle allows the state to
have total control over the utilization of water resources and makes provision for
mechanisms to be put in place to manage water sources using a more holistic
approach, whilst also taking into account the entire water cycle.

The spirit of the Constitution is captured in the National Water Act (Act 36 of
1998), which is to ensure that South Africa’s water resources are protected,
used, developed, conserved, managed and controlled in ways that take into
account amongst other the following factors:

- Promoting the efficient, sustainable and beneficial use of water in the public
  interest;
- Providing for the growing demand for water;
- Promoting equitable access to water; and
- Meeting basic needs of current and future generations.

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4 Hamann (no date). South Africa’s policy transition to sustainability: Environmental and water law.
6 Hamann (no date). South Africa’s policy transition to sustainability: Environmental and water law.
The National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998) also encourages decision makers to be proactive – this implies that it is no longer acceptable for decision makers to make decisions and consider the impact on communities’ rights only when and if someone raises the question. It promotes the participation of people in water resource management. This includes involving people in the management of rivers, dams, wetlands, the surrounding land underground water, as well as human activities that influence them.

2.1.3. National Water Strategy (Draft 1, August 2002)
The National Water Resource Strategy (NWRS) (Draft 1, August 2002), states that, “water management is not just about solving problems; it is also about creating opportunities”. This implies that agencies of state have an affirmative duty to consider the impact of their actions upon places of religious/cultural and historical significance to communities (e.g., rivers, lakes, natural springs, catchment areas and any other area that is significant to a particular community).

The National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) provides an opportunity for communities to participate in the “identification, conservation and management of their cultural and religious resources”. The Act also defines heritage resources as including and accommodating all belief systems. It includes:

- places, buildings, structures and equipment of cultural significance;
- landscapes and national features of cultural significance;
- graves and burial grounds, including –
  - ancestral graves;
  - royal graves and graves of traditional leaders; and
  - places with strong or special association with a particular community or
  - cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reason.


The Commission embodies the vital constitutional principle of protection of the marginalized or potentially marginalized, and indeed perceives diversity as intrinsically beneficial. In the Constitution’s words, it is to operate “on the basis of equality, non-discrimination and free association,” shunning both collective oppression and the erosion of individual freedom. And the Constitution stipulates that the Commission can “recommend the establishment or recognition … of a cultural or other council or councils for a community or communities in South Africa.”

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7 http://www.cceia.org/viewMedia.php/prmTemplateID/8/prmID/5154
The Act seeks;
- to provide for the composition of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities;
- to foster mutual respect among cultural, religious and linguistic communities;
- to recommend the establishment or recognition of community councils in accordance with section 36 or 37.

SECTION THREE:

3.1. INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION AND CULTURE

There are complex interactions in the way religious and cultural communities value water as a natural resource in South Africa. This should be kept in mind, since the approach to water management requires an integrative approach in order to adequately record and consider not only the natural features, but also the social, cultural and economic conditions of a catchment area.8

Definitions are important since they promote a common way of thinking and understanding on a subject. In many cases concepts are used carelessly and without sufficient explanation, and this could trigger conflict and misunderstandings. There are cases where sometimes segments (or sections) of a community are left out of development processes because of undefined intentions or project aims, and this has lead to a situation where communities withdraw their support. In order to safeguard our actions, the term “religion and culture” will be defined using definitions from the literature reviewed during this study. The definitions should serve as a guide for the reader. The researchers feel that the terms of reference could not be addressed sufficiently without these definitions being given first.

3.1.1. Definition of Religion

The concept of religion is problematic in that it can be interpreted differently by different people and different religions. The definition that is closer to the global consensus is that of Gardner (2002)9. Gardner defines religion as that which “offers a means of experiencing a sustaining creative force, whether a creator deity, an awe-inspiring presence in nature, or simply the source of all life”

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8 Expert workshop: Value of water in different regions: Not only a question of economics. BONN International Center for Conservation (BICC).
9 Gardner (2002:10)
There are many different religions; however religions generally hold some common\textsuperscript{10} characteristics.

Some religious experiences could be embodied either in an institution (such as a church, temple and mosque) where religion/worship is separate from daily (domestic) life. Or in some instances this religious experience is deeply embedded in the way communities live their life. Take for instance some of the African traditional religions; where the life of a community is integrated with its natural resources.

\textbf{3.1.2. Definition of culture}

The term “culture” is simply used to refer to a society and its way of life\textsuperscript{11}. Many definitions of culture refer to particular values and beliefs. Other definitions refer to the everyday life and behavior of people that flows from these beliefs\textsuperscript{12}.

\textbf{3.1.3. Function of culture in society}

Culture plays different roles in different communities, especially in a multicultural context as is South Africa. Mazrui (1980) lists several functions of culture and this will be used as a basis for this study.

Mazrui (1980), states that culture provides a lens of perception and a way of looking at reality\textsuperscript{13}. It refers to customs and traditions, ritual, religion, music, dance, language, food, games, clothes and objects.

These definitions demonstrate that in any activity, whether it is implemented by the state or privately, should respect local traditional and cultural frameworks whilst also challenging the stereotypes. Furthermore, given that culture shapes our way of living and acting in the world, it may also have the capacity to bring about change of attitudes and bring about sustainable development, if approached sensitively.

\textbf{3.1.4. Culture and religion in South Africa}

Culture and religion play an important part in the lives of most South Africans, more especially among rural African communities. Water has been, and still is, central to both their culture and religion. The African people have always maintained a connection between water and land. Water also plays a central role in many religions and beliefs in South Africa, and there are often rules with regard to the use of water based on the religious teachings and principles. As a


\textsuperscript{11} Bodley, John H (1994) Cultural anthropology: Tribes, states and global systems.

\textsuperscript{12} (no date) UNESCO – UNEP International Environmental Education Program

\textsuperscript{13} Mazrui (1980:47)
“source of life”, it represents birth or re-birth (see baptism). It also represents purity. And these qualities confer a highly symbolic and even sacred status to water. Water is therefore a key element in ceremonies and religious rites. Religion provides a variety of examples of how water has been regarded as part of the sacred life process not simply another product for consumption.

This study acknowledges the fact that it will be difficult to treat ‘religion’ as a homogenous system or worldview. Therefore, though the study addresses all the selected religions, emphasis will be put on two broad religious worldviews: 1) the Western religious and cultural uses of water, and 2) the African religious and cultural uses of water.

### 3.1.5. The African and western worldview

The study distinguishes between the African and Western worldviews i.e. their mode of operation is different in many respects. And therefore the value of water holds different meanings to people from these different backgrounds. And the approaches they use to value water in many respects vary according to these societal contexts and the cultural settings\(^\text{14}\).

The reason for this approach is based on the fact that the use of water by cultural/religious groups with close bearings to the western world view can be easily incorporated into Schedule1 activities (as listed in the National Water Act, 1998). It is relatively easier to distinguish between sacred and secular in the western world view and is therefore easier to identify cultural/religious uses of water. In the context of South Africa, in the western world view, water is valued through a utilitarian approach – and seen as a marketable economic good. Whilst in the African worldviews (and other societies with a similar societal structure), water is not only of social and economic importance, but of cultural and spiritual importance. Water and its uses, play a key role in community building and may also take upon a broader range of non-economic values and meanings, including the spiritual dimension\(^\text{15}\). Therefore in the African traditional worldview, there is no simplified way of separating domestic and agricultural use of water and those activities that are sacred and secular.

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\(^\text{14}\) Expert workshop: Value of water in different regions: Not only a question of economics. BONN International Center for Conservation (BICC).

\(^\text{15}\) Expert workshop: Value of water in different regions: Not only a question of economics. BONN International Center for Conservation (BICC).
SECTION FOUR
4.1. RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

4.1.1. Identifying cultural and religious uses of water: Common practices
There are a range of practices that are performed by cultural and religious communities that involve the use of water (from sources such as rivers, streams, dams and springs). Some of these uses are cited in this section, but limited to the information collected during field visits to three (randomly selected) provinces in South Africa. During the field visits an attempt was made to consult with communities that were representative of either the African, Hindu, Islamic and Christian cultures and/or religious faiths, and their use of water will be discussed below.

I) Baptism - Almost all Christian and African traditional churches in South Africa perform initiation ceremonies (Baptism) which involve the use of water. Fresh water sources such as rivers, streams, lakes and dams are preferred sites for Baptism. In some cases baptism pools are built. These pools are built in areas where communities no longer have access to natural water sources. For instance, the Nazarath Church (Inanda, Kwa-Zulu Natal) now uses a pool to baptize its members (see Figure 1). The pool is nourished with fresh water that is channeled from a nearby spring. This is a sacred water feature in the African tradition.

Baptism is usually performed with a person standing in water; the water is then poured on the upper body. Water is either poured onto the head three times (affusion) and/or sometimes sprinkled over the head (aspersio)n. Although Baptism may be regarded differently in different denominations of Christianity, the symbolism of the practice remains consistent. According to the Christian followers “Baptism is a symbol of liberation from oppression of sin which separates man from god” and (for Catholics) “baptism is a ritual of welcoming or declaring ones belief in Christ and sign of welcoming to the church”.

![Figure 1: Inanda, Kwa-Zulu Natal—Holy water from a natural spring (left) is channelled to a pool used for Baptism (right). The pool was built by the Nazarath Baptist Church and used by one of South Africa’s fastest growing faiths, known as the “Shembes.”](image)

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16 the water page- water in religion
17 the water page- water in religion
The symbol of water is very significant in the Christian tradition. It is biblically referred to as ‘the living water’, ‘water of life’ because it represents the spirit of God, eternal life. Living water refers to the river, sea or any moving water\textsuperscript{18}. Water is linked to salvation. Water is also used as a cleansing and healing agent. In the Zionist practice water plays a crucial role in the expulsion of evil and illness, to remove \textit{isimnyama} (the dark cloud that envelopes the person and attracts bad luck and attacks by witches). The person has to wash where there is flowing water\textsuperscript{19}. All the above-mentioned properties of water make it a powerful symbol.

II) Initiation ceremonies – the initiation of young males and females into adulthood is a wide practice in the African culture. Historically these practices in South Africa have been confined to rural areas, but through increasing rural-urban migration initiation ceremonies have rapidly gained popularity in urban areas as well. During some female initiation ceremonies in the Vha-Venda culture, girls (of a certain age) go to the river to bathe and cleanse their body for up to 2hrs in the early parts of the morning (between 2am – 4am)\textsuperscript{20}. This cleansing ritual symbolizes maturity, and plays an important role in the initiation process. The male circumcision initiation ceremony is similar; it is also necessary for males to bathe in any local river just before they return home. During the initiation of a traditional healer, the apprentice is required to stay by the river for a number of days, during which time he or she is introduced to river spirits and constantly bathe in the stream of the river.

III) Rituals - The use of water is fundamental in the rites and rituals performed by most religions in South Africa. Some religions in South Africa (Hinduism and African traditional religions) have attempted to induce rain through the performance of certain water related rituals.

In the Venda region of the Northern Province, people have placed great importance on agriculture, which requires regular rainfall. Good relations with ancestors are maintained by placating – or protecting the water spirits by placing offerings at the Phiphidi Falls. Beer and grain are left on a sacred stone near the top of the falls to foster good relations with the ancestral spirits and the Rain Queen - “modjadji”. These rituals are performed to invoke rain that will in-turn help nourish their crops and support their livelihood\textsuperscript{21}.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Sundler (1961:206)
\item Chidester (1992:141)
\item Mutshimbwe Water Users Association (2005)
\item Notes from field visit (2005)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Hinduism also is rooted in a tradition that has developed through the performance of rituals. Before any of these rituals is performed, all utensils to be used must be purified with water. This cleansing ritual is called “abishaik” - an act of purification\textsuperscript{22}. Water used for the cleansing rituals requires small quantities of water, and tap water is generally used. Water is used as a spiritual purification, for which morning cleansing is an everyday obligation. Temples are supposed to be located near a water source, and followers must bathe before entering the temple (can adapt as situations differ).

IV) Final resting place for the deceased – Lake Fundudzi in the Northern Province of South Africa is sacred to the Vha-Venda people\textsuperscript{23}. It is South Africa’s largest inland lake and situated along the Mutale River. Several beliefs are upheld about Lake Fundudzi - one of them is that it is inhabited by the god of fertility in the form of a python. It is also symbolic of the Vha-Venda ancestors and treated like a holy shrine. Deceased members of the tribe are first buried in the grave by the kraal, after a number of years their bones are exhumed and then cremated and thrown into the lake. The lake therefore has become the final resting place for the ancestors.

Among Hindu followers in South Africa cremation is the preferred method of disposing the deceased. The conventional way of disposing the ashes is by releasing them into a nearby river, stream or directly into the ocean. The ashes are contained in a clay pot, together with fruits and other materials used whilst performing the final rites. Cemeteries and funeral grounds are usually located near these rivers and accessed by the wider community.

\textsuperscript{22} Ramakrishna Society of South Africa (2005)
\textsuperscript{23} Mutale Water Users Association (2005)
Figure 3: (left) Lake Fundudzi in the Northern Province is the final resting place for the ancestors of the Vha-Venda community. (right) In Kwa-Zulu Natal a “ghat” - flowing body of water consecrated with Ganges water – provides a safe platform for the Hindu community to perform the final rites for the deceased before their ashes are released into the Umgeni River.

Ablution - Water is important for cleansing and purification for Muslims. All Muslims must wash before approaching god for prayer. Some mosques have a courtyard with a pool of clean water in the centre, but most ablutions are found outside the walls. There are two types of ablutions practiced by the Islamic community. The first is “ghusi” – major ablation. This must be done for the deceased before they are buried, after sexual intercourse and before main feast. The second type is “wudu” – minor ablation. This must be done before each 5 day prayer. Pure water (not necessarily from the river) is used to wash face, rub head, hands, elbows and feet up to ankles. In some instances Muslims are obliged to wash the whole body. This means that they must have access to water resource.

V) Site for holy places - Holy places (such as Hindu temples and mosques) are usually located on river banks, on the foot of a mountain and/or along the coastline. Important sites are those areas of convergence between land and river. These areas are regarded as high energy centres. Hindu temples usually have a pond / river near, and are regularly consecrated with holy water from the Ganges River in India.
VI) Medicinal uses – water animism is based on a belief that natural objects (such as river water, lakes and springs) are “living and possess souls”. African traditional healers collect water from rivers and streams since they are believed to possess healing powers from the spirits residing in them. Those suffering from illnesses would go to a traditional healer, who in turn, uses this water when preparing their medicine.

VII) Livestock farming – Livestock farming has been recognized in cultures across South Africa. For African traditional communities livestock form part of their livelihood and therefore part of food security. Keeping livestock is also a sign of prosperity and social status. Water, therefore, is central to the wellbeing and survival of the livestock. According to African religious beliefs life is one; spiritual life is linked to daily life. In this case certain domestic uses such as using river water for bathing, and drinking water (for agriculture, cattle and families) can also be interpreted as a religious use. Water represents nourishment not only for the body, but the spirit as well. In African communities fetching water is not just about filling a container, but more than that – it involves the freedom of women, the turning of girls into womanhood. Women talk about things freely and laugh louder by the river side than they ever could in the village. People of all ages wash at the river too, and you cannot do that at a tap in the village. Men say they are going for a bath, but in most cases it is really a whole set of things, talking, sports, and recreation and even stick fighting by the river. Water plays a very important role in the spiritual health of the nation as well.

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24 The water page – water in animism
VIII) Source of food
Rivers and the ecosystems they support are also an important source of sustenance for many cultural and religious communities in South Africa\(^{25}\) - fish and spinach-‘morogo’ are the mainstay of traditional diets.

4.1.2. The extentSCALE of cultural and religious uses of water
Many difficulties were encountered when trying to quantify the extentSCALE of water used by cultural and religious communities. The reason for that is based on the fact that cultural and religious uses of water are based on ‘use’ and ‘non-use’ requirements. Some of the ‘use’ requirements are the use of water for spiritual and physical health, recreation in its broad sense, fishing for sustenance, domestic uses, live-stock and agriculture. The ‘non-use’ requirements include the protection of the sacred spirits in the rivers, lakes, sea and natural springs, protection of family and village totems which dwell in these water sources and protection of some of these areas and landscapes (e.g. waterfalls, rocks hanging over rivers, stones protruding from the deep of the river or lake, convergence of two or more rivers) which have significance to the communities close to them.

The National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998) defines eleven different kinds of water uses. Among these, there is no separate category for religious and cultural uses. This also makes it difficult when trying to identify the affected (cultural and religious) groups during the implementation of water related projects\(^{26}\). Currently, religious and cultural communities fall under what the National Water Act calls “Schedule 1” users. These are people who use small amounts of water (not for commercial purposes). These groups are therefore not expected to register or apply for licenses.

In most cases (as discussed in 4.1.1.) cultural and religious uses of water required very little water to be extracted, and water is generally used from the site accessed (see Baptism, cleansing and rituals in 4.1.1.). There are some instances where activities of cultural and religious communities (that involve the use of water) may impact water quality and compromise health standards (see Final resting place, 4.1.1.).

In the many rural parts of South Africa communities still rely on nearby river and dam water for domestic use. The National Water Resource Strategy (Draft 1, August 2002) further states, “Resource-directed measures will look at the quality of water, quantity of water, the animals that live in the water resource, and the vegetation (plants) around the water resource. All these must be healthy for the water resource to function properly and to provide water”.

The table below indicates if water is accessed from fresh water source or tap water (treated water).

\(^{25}\) Personal comments received from members of the Mutale Water Users Association (2005)
\(^{26}\) comment received from internal workshop held with DWAF officials (2005)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent and scale of such uses</th>
<th>Preferred sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baptism</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water source</td>
<td>Preferred sites for baptism include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mostly natural sources*</td>
<td>• rivers,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Extent</td>
<td>• springs,</td>
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<tr>
<td>water is used at source</td>
<td>• lakes,</td>
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<td>• Scale</td>
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<td>very little/no water is</td>
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<td><strong>Preferred sites for initiation include</strong></td>
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<td>• lakes, and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• streams</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Initiation ceremonies</strong></td>
<td>Areas used by initiates for bathing should be isolated.</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Water source</td>
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<tr>
<td>only natural sources*</td>
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<td>• Extent</td>
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<td>water is used on-site</td>
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<td>• Scale</td>
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<td>very little water is</td>
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<td>only natural sources*</td>
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<td>water is used on-site</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very little/no water is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extracted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ablution</strong></td>
<td>No preferred sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water source</td>
<td>Tap/treated water is adequate for ablution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treated water**</td>
<td>Approximately 5L of water(^{27}) per person is required for ablution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scale</td>
<td>Water is collected from rivers and/or water falls believed to possess strong water spirits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water is used on-site</td>
<td>Unable to determine the quantity of water used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water is extracted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rituals (rainmaking)</strong></td>
<td>&lt;5L of water is used to clean utensils used for rituals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both natural and treated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water may be used on-site or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a small amount collected and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taken away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water is extracted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rituals (cleansing)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only treated water**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water is extracted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medicinal uses</strong></td>
<td>Generally &lt;5L of water is extracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural sources*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water is extracted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Livestock farming</strong></td>
<td>Unable to determine the quantity of water used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural sources*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water is extracted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of food</strong></td>
<td>Unable to determine the quantity of water used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not applicable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Natural sources include springs, rivers, lakes and streams.  
**Refers to treated tap water. Generally water used for household and domestic purposes.

\(^{27}\) General Secretary of the Jamiet Ulama – KZN Council for Muslim theologians(2005)
4.1.3. The impact of the uses on the water resources

There are two main issues that pertain to the cultural and religious use of water; they are issues around (i) access to water sources and (ii) pollution. The department needs to address these issues in its water management strategy or other complementary strategies. Communities need to identify the areas they use and reach consensus about the area’s significance and relevance to both the community and to families. The department and the communities should reach an agreement on the management, care, protection, conservation and sustainable use of a particular area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Impact on water quality</th>
<th>General comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>Unlikely to have a negative impact on water quality</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Initiation ceremonies            | Some are likely to have a negative impact on water quality | - The entire body is pasted with ochre and this is washed off with river water.  
- Could affect water quality and downstream users. |
| Final resting place for the deceased | Likely to have a negative impact on water quality | Ashes and other materials (such as fruit and clothe) are released in the river together with the ashes. |
| Ablution                         | Unlikely to have a negative impact on water quality – treated water is used | None                                                                            |
| Rituals (to remove evil spirits) | Likely to have a negative impact on water quality | - Rituals are performed to remove bad luck/evil spirits from a person; these bad spirits are released into the water and could lead to "spiritual pollution".  
- Food and material items are also thrown into the river during the ritual |
| Medicinal uses                   | Unlikely to have a negative impact on water quality | None                                                                            |
| Livestock farming                | Likely to have a negative impact on water quality | - The defecation of cattle is likely to increase the nutrient content of fresh water and underground water stores  
- could increase growth of phytoplankton and algae bloom. |
| Source of food                   | Unlikely to have a negative impact on water quality | None                                                                            |

28 comment received from internal workshop held with DWAF officials (2005)
4.1.4. The impact on the water users if these water uses are affected negatively

The International Rivers Network has stated that:

Southern Africa is, by and large, a dry place. Water is perhaps the region's most precious resource—the source of life itself. And yet the region's life-giving source of water—river and their catchments—are increasingly under threat from ill-conceived development schemes.²⁹

Several religions and cultures have adapted and re-adjusted their cultural and religious practices because of new and challenging conditions they find themselves in. This has become easy for those religions and cultures that subscribe to dualism, i.e., who distinguish between religion and culture (e.g. Christianity and some of the Eastern religions). But for other religions and cultures (e.g. African traditional religions) that subscribe to the oneness of life, that do not separate religion from culture, adapting has been a hard challenge to face. For some African traditional religions agriculture, farming, hunting, nature (rivers and dams) and graves all are integral part of their religion. Anything that disturbs this set-up cuts through their religious and cultural values. For example, the manipulation of river streams and catchments areas may affect dams and other river parts which are used for cultural and religious practices. Activities like diverting river streams, hydroelectric schemes and developing huge dams close to communities may have adverse outcomes for communities. Among such outcomes could be:

- Devastation of river ecosystems, which are part of the broader cultural and religious worldview (totems and river plants used for medicinal purposes).
- Tempering with river streams and dams may cause flooding which may affect the land inhabited by people, their agricultural fields, grazing land, their livestock and could affect the graves (who in most rural areas are sometimes close to rivers and dams) of their ancestors.
- Excessive mining of groundwater and aquifer for industrial and commercial purposes could affect rivers and dams that are used for cultural and religious purposes.
- Water pollution from industries, mining, agricultural chemicals and pesticides, sewage, disease and dumping from shipping wastes pose health danger for these religious and cultural practices.
- There could be a concern among the cultural and religious practitioners about what seems to be the selling and trading, in market-based systems, of what (water) they regard as sacred.

²⁹ Internet source: International Rivers Network [http://www.irn.org/programs/safrica/]
A full discussion of water use therefore must incorporate both scientific and moral reflection on water availability and allocation. Finding ways of connecting a scientific understanding of how the world works with a moral understanding of how humans ought to live has proven difficult, but is a vital part of the sustainability problem. We hope that exploring these aspects of water use will be helpful in understanding how best to approach the larger issue of sustainability.

4.2. Effective water management; consider the following:

ACKNOWLEDGE that fresh water sources such as rivers, springs, and lakes are also considered as sacred to some cultural and religious communities in the area.

RECOGNISE that people’s relation to fresh water has given rise to aspects of non-material culture, through folklore, music, mythology, oral tradition and customs, and that their reflection can be found in social practices and the traditional forms of social organization for managing water resources.

BE AWARE that the cultural and religious values of water are of great importance to communities living in these areas and their surrounding, and constitutes part of their identity, therefore their loss may not only contribute to their alienation from the fresh water source, but also significant social and ecological impacts.

4.3. Policy issues
The Department has a leading role in assisting, advising and protecting the religious and cultural communities to achieve their goal within the stipulations of the legislation. In most cases the use of a resource does not necessarily ensure the right practice. Religious communities might have been using the water resource for many years but that does not say how they were taking care of the resource. The Department on the other hand, though is the custodian of the water resources, could not be informed about these cultural and religious uses of water and their impact on water sources. The water management policy should cater for the possibility of development integrated water management strategies that will include cultural and religious systems. Since religious cultural uses of water differ from context to context, from urban to rural, from religious denomination to another pertinent issues should be addressed at project level. The broad policy framework should, as stated in the Constitution, recommend that:

- The religious freedom of all must be observed and the practicalities of each religion be dealt with on the local government level
- Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community- a) to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their language.
  b) to govern, use, manage, regulate, recover, conserve, enhance and renew their water sources without interference.
c) The holistic approach to water use, environmental, cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic should be reflected in the policy. These rights must be consistent with other sections of the provisions of the Constitution.

5. CONCLUSION

The great question for the future is how will South Africa manage its dwindling water reserves? Subsequent to that question will be the question of either to care for the needs of different belief systems or to care for all South Africans equally? Fisher (2001) maintains that questions of water use and allocation will be among the many contentious dimensions of the sustainability discussion. During the last century, global water consumption grew more than twice as fast as population. Roughly one-third of the world population now lives in areas subject to moderate to high water stress, and the U.N. projects that the proportion of people affected could double during the next 25 years. Allocation of water between agriculture, manufacturing, household use, and ecosystem maintenance are politically sensitive issues that will impact food availability, human health, and culture he argues (http://gsa.confex.com/gsa/2001AM/finalprogram/abstract_23639.).

To be effective therefore, policy discussions on water use must consider issues of availability, efficiency, human equity, needs of ecological systems, and the well-being of future generations. To be seen as fair, they must involve the principal stakeholders. Negotiating this complex of competing needs and interests requires both a scientific understanding of how water resources are sustained and used and a moral understanding of how different participants value water and understand the notion of equity. The power of religion and culture should not be underestimated, more especially if religion is understood in relation to the transformation of public life. Religion and culture should be engaged with the goal of encouraging their role in public life which would contribute positively to both the making of cultural values and the formulation and implementation of public policy. Religious and cultural organizations can make a great contribution to the effort to build a sustainable world.