

## **Disciplinary trends in Africa: water science and technology**

Africa Knows! Conference 2020-2021

Panel D18, 21 January 2021

Within the SDGs, water is recognized as important field, in terms of having its own SDG and in having close connections to other fields like food production, health and energy – to name just a few. This panel explored the many facets of water studies and technologies on the African continent, with an explicit focus on how innovations are studied, adapted and accepted in different settings – ranging from urban to rural, local to (inter)national, and natural to human, but also ranging from academic to policy environments or water user communities. The session built on three papers (2 submissions could not be presented), followed by a discussion. Jan Willem Liebrand and colleagues explored the challenge of decolonizing concepts and discussions on water science and technology in Africa. Keziah Ngugi and colleagues assessed the different technologies used to improve access to water in Kitui, Kenya, especially whether these were individual, private, community, and government owned, to suggest that private and individual resources performed better in terms of management. Emanuele Fantini and colleagues linked the presence of the Italian construction company Salini in Ethiopia to several infrastructural projects implemented under different political regimes. The discussion following the papers was extremely rich, with exchanges on modernist approaches, donor funded projects, and possible disconnections between projects and policies that are being implemented. Issues identified in the session include the key aspect of who decides on/defines “success”, who is allowed to build projects and thus “success”, and who controls/decides which knowledge to seek and apply. These claims of success are related to specific modes of success, and as such select for specific modes of development and technological choices. As such, the session stressed that scholars and practitioners need to take up (again) the question which debates they want to engage with and promote.