

BUILDING BRIDGES: COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND SECURE WATER MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Security and assessments of vulnerability to terrorism or other security threats has been placed high on lists of importance since the attacks on the World Trade Center (New York City) and Pentagon (Washington, DC). Often security is conceived of as a matter of technical and paramilitary resources—locks, alarm systems, fences, doors, armed guards, security inspectors. Yet, security in rural communities in the United States has traditionally relied more on social infrastructure, rather than physical and policing infrastructure, to protect, maintain, and enhance assets. These same strategies are key to sustainable community water management. Through a focus on building the social networks that draw on local knowledge of the surrounding ecology and environment, culture, and economic context, rural communities could recognize and adapt to changes. Improving capacity for disaster response involves enhancing the networks that connect communities at a regional, state, or watershed. These strategies are equally applicable to attempts at improving water sustainability through building systems for water management capacity.

OBJECTIVE AND APPROACH

Based on analysis of the Rural Community Assistance Program database of field work with rural communities across the U.S., this paper will propose a model for understanding the role of social networks in improving sustainability and security in water management. It will highlight the key role of government, intermediary non-governmental organizations, and communities in this process, and highlight key indicators of improved management capacity for security and sustainability. Case studies will be drawn from the database to highlight key aspects of this model.

Results and potential impacts on water research, education, policy and management
Through focusing on building social networks, this research could add a key social and community element to the already significant work done on developing systems for improving water sustainability and security.