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River health and management through an indigenous knowledge lens: the case of Mayanja River, Uganda

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Abstract

Despite the recognition of integrated water resources management approaches, their limited adoption is partly due to gaps in the community-centered models. The increasing degradation of the culturally attached Mayanja River catchment presented the need to explore the values, cultures, beliefs, and management approaches that have preserved the river's health until now. A qualitative survey on indigenous knowledge was done among the mainly Baganda ethnic group, where elders and younger participants gave views on the river status, values, culture and management actions of the river. Overall, participants expressed a clear distinction between the degraded and non-degraded river status using water and biodiversity characteristics. These characteristics agreed with the scientific phenomenon of degradation despite the differences in the ontological backgrounds of the participants. Elders noted that the supernatural origin of the Mayanja River myth contributed to norms that preserved the river and it compelled the locals to participate in river management actions. The outside interests and loss of culture led to discredited traditional beliefs and limited community action on the river among young participants. The exceptional insights into the cultural and social organisational aspects of the river among elders can be embraced to supplement the existing community river health management strategies.

Keywords:
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