

Case Study

DAMS AND SPIRITS

Christian development agency introduced an irrigation project into a folk Islamic culture in East Africa. The hydrologists and the village farmers had high expectations for the project. However, they were soon disappointed. The rainfall was lower than expected, and the dams were not collecting enough water to irrigate the garden adequately. The people who lived in the village knew the harvest would be low, and they feared a food shortage. They knew many of them would suffer hunger and death.

The village elders asked the hydrologists, who were Christians, what they could do about improving the project. The hydrologists examined the water sources, and concluded that there was no way to increase the amount of water the dams were collecting. The hydrologists believed the dams were as efficient as they could be. They saw the low amount of rainfall, rather than dam design, as the central problem.

The village elders met, and decided there was another problem. They believed the water level was low because the Christians refused to make sacrifices to the local spirits when they built the dams. The elders believed the spirits control rainfall in the region, and they believed the spirits were angry because the Christians built the dams without making a sacrifice.

How should the hydrologists respond to the village elders?