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## 'Chasing for Water': Everyday Practices of Water Access in Peri-Urban Ashaiman, Ghana

### Megan Peloso

Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada; mmpeloso@gmail.com

### Cynthia Morinville

Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada; cynthia.morinville@gmail.com

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**ABSTRACT:** Despite recent reports suggesting that access to improved sources of drinking water is rising in Ghana, water access remains a daily concern for many of those living in the capital region. Throughout the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), the urban poor manage uncertainty and establish themselves in the city by leveraging a patchwork system of basic services that draws importantly from informal systems and supplies. This paper takes a case study approach, using evidence gathered from two-months of fieldwork in a peri-urban informal settlement on the fringe of Accra, to explore everyday practices involved in procuring water for daily needs that routinely lead residents outside of the official water supply system. Findings from this case study demonstrate that respondents make use of informal water services to supplement or 'patch up' gaps left by the sporadic water flow of the official service provider, currently Ghana Water Company Ltd. (GWCL). Basic water access is thus constructed through an assemblage of coping strategies and infrastructures. This analysis contributes to understandings of heterogeneity in water access by attending to the everyday practices by which informality is operationalised to meet the needs of the urban poor, in ways that may have previously been overshadowed. This research suggests, for example, that although water priced outside of the official service provider is generally higher per unit, greater security may be obtained from smaller repetitive transactions as well as having the flexibility to pursue multiple sources of water on a day-to-day basis.

**KEYWORDS:** Water supply, urbanisation, informality, everyday practice, urban poor, Ghana

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### INTRODUCTION

In the absence of affordable and reliable state services, alternative strategy making is commonplace amongst the urban poor, and many are able to meet basic daily needs through a patchwork system of informal activities and networks. To earn a living, urban dwellers in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) are likely to engage in multiple forms of informal employment to supplement their income (Hart, 1973; GSS, 2008). Similarly, uncertainty is at the forefront of daily water access in urban and peri-urban Ghana. Responsible for the provision, distribution and management of urban water supply in Ghana, The Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) meets only about 60% of the total water demands (Nyarko et al., 2008; WaterAid, 2008; Ghana Government Portal, 2013; JMP, 2013). As such, maintaining several access points to water sources is one practice through which the urban poor