

# Developing communities and water resources management

G. Schoeman

*Afrosearch/Foundation for People Centred Development, South Africa*

## Abstract

The South African Constitution provides the basis for defining the promotion of equity, equality and the advancement of the quality of life of all people of South Africa. The National Water Act has been hailed internationally as providing a promising legal framework within which to implement equitable and sustainable water management. This framework mandates a process of bringing together all stakeholders for the purpose of building partnerships and networks and promoting consensus on water management issues in an empowering, democratic and transparent manner. A core focus is the need to promote an effective and efficient approach to the structured promotion of stakeholder participation in water resource management. This Paper documents the work undertaken and successes achieved in the empowerment and involvement of previously disadvantaged communities through the training of “Catchment Mentors”. Training has allowed the initiative to fully support and integrate with existing initiatives to promote accreditation and develop opportunities for certificated training courses that will promote career options and opportunities.

*Keywords:* Integrated Water Resources Management, disadvantaged communities, stakeholder participation, pro-poor, capacity building, training.

## 1 Introduction

One of the major challenges in South Africa and in many developing countries is to manage its water resources for the benefit of especially poor people and, thus, to contribute to poverty eradication. However, while a blanket management approach may promote enhancement of the resource, experience has shown that this seldom translates into enhancement of the well being of poor marginalised groups and communities. Resource management strategies should deliberately



focus on the cultivation of actions that will build the capacity and address the specific needs of the poor, in particular, previously disadvantaged individuals and communities. Based on this truism, an African Water Vision was developed in preparation for the Second World Water Forum in 2000 that included, inter alia, a focus on the need to actively promote integrated water resources development and management. The African Water Vision assisted in shaping the global vision of “Equitable and sustainable utilisation of water for social, environmental justice, and economic benefits for present and future generations” adopted by the Forum.

In addition, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) has been unveiled. NEPAD focuses on measures for promoting the application of Africa’s human, economic, technological and natural resources in initiatives to advance growth and to prevent the continent being trapped in a vicious cycle of conflict, poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation. The collective vision of these initiatives offers the opportunity as well as the requirement to sustainably link water management with socio-economic development programmes.

In line with the paradigm of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), the South African National Water Act recognises the need for ensuring the integrated management of water resources and, where appropriate, the devolution and delegation of water resource management functions to a regional or catchment level. The National Water Act emphasises the relationship between socio-economic development and integrated water management that incorporates a developmental or poverty eradication approach. In essence this approach is underpinned by the following values, amongst others:

- ≈ Promotion of an integrated approach to Water Resources Management
- ≈ Satisfaction of basic human needs of all citizens
- ≈ Promotion of participation and the involvement of communities in decisions that will affect their well-being

The South African Constitution provides the basis for defining the promotion of equity, equality and the advancement of the quality of life of all people of South Africa. The National Water Act has been hailed internationally as providing a promising legal framework within which to implement equitable and sustainable water management. This framework mandates a process of bringing together all stakeholders for the purpose of building partnerships and networks and promoting consensus on water management issues in an empowering, democratic and transparent manner. A core focus is the need to promote an effective and efficient approach to the structured promotion of stakeholder participation in water resource management. Participation provides a constructive vehicle for promoting understanding between different interest groups about their needs and problems, assists in communication between stakeholders and ensures that implementation and management of water resources is grounded in increased understanding and co-operation.

## 2 Addressing ‘nested’ imbalances

It has been found that the effectiveness of IWRM in South Africa is currently hampered by three nested imbalances. First, the distribution of decision-making authority is biased in favour of centralised governance institutions at the expense of stakeholders. Second, where stakeholders are able to participate in decision-making, large-scale users dominate the arena to the exclusion of small-scale users. Third, in cases where small-scale users are allowed to offer their inputs, this task tends to be assumed by men rather than women.

Many small-scale users are victims of a long history of discrimination. The legacy of this history is a considerable backlog on economic, educational and social fronts. This situation is further complicated by prejudices and negative stereotypes entrenched among many large-scale water users. Addressing the imbalance between these two groups of stakeholders in a WMA will require the empowerment of small-scale users, the sensitisation of large-scale users, and extensive conflict resolution skills and strategies.

The implementation of IWRM requires that each of these three imbalances be rectified, and capacity building will play an important part in bringing about and maintaining a balanced system. Such an approach needs to take cognisance of the fact that specific actions are required in respect of each of the identified imbalances.

### a. Addressing Gender Imbalance

Addressing the under-involvement of female members of traditional African communities in IWRM has three aspects: the empowerment of women; the sensitisation of role-players; and the incorporation of women’s concerns into every stage of policy and programme implementation – a process that is referred to as “mainstreaming a gender perspective”.

### b. Ensuring shared responsibility

The NWA and the requirements for IWRM demands that DWAF’s current decision-making model be modified in the direction of greater decentralisation, coordination and co-operative governance. This paradigm shift requires that the entire spectrum of stakeholders – including large-scale and small-scale water users, Civil Society Bodies, environmental lobbying groups, etc. – be capacitated for meaningful participation. At the same time, governance institutions should be capacitated for the complementary process of devolving authority. Finally, all role-players (governance institutions as well as stakeholders) need to be equipped with certain competencies that specifically relate to IWRM philosophy and practice.

### c. Conflict resolution

All role-players need to be equipped with the competency to defuse conflicts that might arise from the redistribution of benefits and opportunities in favour of small-scale users.



Figure 1 below provides a visual depiction of the relationships among the three imbalances and the capacity building initiatives that are needed to correct them.

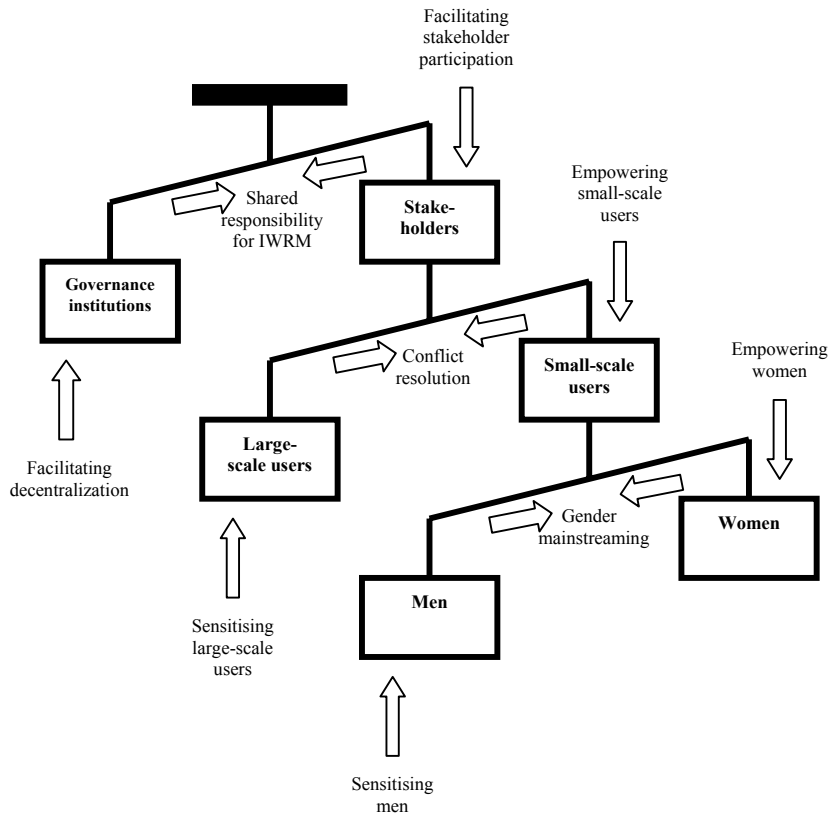


Figure 1: IWRM-related capacity imbalances.

The promotion of the equal involvement of previously disadvantaged groups and communities offers exciting opportunities for integrating water services and water resource activities at grass roots level to more closely reflect the integrated character of water use management within poor, especially rural communities. However, for pro-poor initiatives to materialize within the context of water resources management, the promotion of stakeholder participation must be structured in a way that promotes initiatives to redress past inequities, imbalances and discrimination.

### 3 Moving from policy to practice

The imperative to move from policy to practice and launch integrated water resources management within the context of Water Management Areas (WMA) served as basis for the initiation of a collaborative project between the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) and the Danish Donor Organisation Danida. The project aimed at providing support to DWAF in the process of establishing IWRM and the development of Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs) in three WMAs in South Africa. The vision of the project had been:

- ≈ That IWRM would be developed from a strategic level to an implementation level in accordance with existing Constitutional, legislative and policy frameworks; and
- ≈ That IWRM would be used to empower previously disadvantaged groups and encourage participation in the management of water resources in South Africa.

The following Figure provides a visual overview of the three selected pilot water management areas in South Africa.

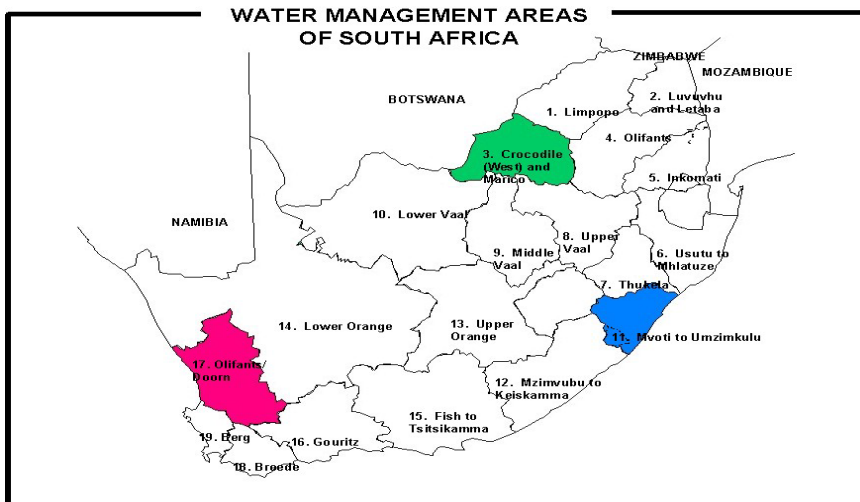


Figure 2: Project WMAs.

A Review of the involvement of previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs) in the CMA establishment processes found that, in general, approaches that had previously been adopted were less than adequate when evaluated against internationally accepted criteria. For example, there were inadequacies in

- ≈ Identifying real, as opposed to perceived, problems or needs

- ≈ Identifying the correct beneficiaries i.e. stakeholders, how they are consulted and how their needs are incorporated; and
- ≈ Obtaining a common understanding of overall objectives, purpose and results

Two innovative approaches were implemented by the IWRM project in order to address some of the short-comings identified in the Review, aimed primarily at PDIs. These were to:

- ≈ Identify and train catchment mentors (the focus of this paper), and to
- ≈ Introduce a Participatory Developmental Project Cycle Management (PCM) approach for IWRM Programmes

## 4 Overview of the pilot project

For many communities in South Africa, involvement in water related issues has been restricted to, at best, formal, technology-driven water supply and sanitation programmes and projects. Promoting constructive water resources management at local level requires an understanding of the link between the deterioration of the water source and its causes AND the ability to identify and engage in alternative activities. This requires the active involvement of communities in both problem and solution identification and to develop interventions to harness existing beliefs, custom, and practice as far as possible.

In addition, while communities are frequently fairly well organised at local level, there is a need to ensure that their participation in planning and management of water resources management is strengthened at an intermediate level to allow active participation on fora and other catchment management structures.

A particular focus of the project was to build the capacity of role-players from previously disadvantaged communities and to equip them with competencies, identified as essential for promoting their full participation in processes and structures related to the promotion of IWRM in South Africa. The need to ensure that capacity-building activities would support formal training initiatives and allow sustainable career opportunities was deemed a vital component of this approach.

A national participative process identified the need for skilled facilitators / community mentors to promote an effective and efficient approach to the structured promotion of stakeholder participation in water resource management. Such participation was required to provide a constructive vehicle for promoting understanding between different interest groups about their needs and problems, assisting in communication between stakeholders and ensuring that implementation and management of water resources is grounded in increased understanding and co-operation at grassroots level. In particular, it was identified that the empowerment and involvement of previously disadvantaged communities would best be achieved through the training of "Catchment Mentors/Champions" who could promote community-based participation in the planning and management of water resources as well as water supply and related health and sanitation issues.



## 5 Development of the Catchment Mentor training course

Because of the need to ensure that the training of Catchment Mentors would allow sustainable career opportunities, an integral focus of the project had been the development of nationally accredited training courses – forming part of the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to empower the constructive involvement of communities in IWRM.

The qualifications, one on NQF Level 2 and another on Level 4, offered the first ever non-technical water-related training courses to be accepted into the NQF in South Africa. The resultant training has allowed the initiative to fully support and integrate with existing national skills development objectives to promote accreditation and develop opportunities for certificated training courses that will promote career options and opportunities as well as providing opportunities for retraining and re-deploying Department of Water Affairs and Forestry staff in line with the Department's changing regulatory and support functions and skills development commitments.

The development of the two levels of certificated qualifications provides significant new opportunities for capacity building within the water sector if teamed up with the existing General Education and Training Certificate: Water Services as it offers the 'bridge' between the GET and HET qualifications Bands.

The GETC level or Level 1 of the NQF is a key stage within the learning pathway. It provides the opportunity for under-educated people with limited formal education to move from Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and gain access to Further Education and Training (FET). FET in and of itself becomes the bridge to accessing higher education opportunities within the Higher Education and Training band (NQF levels 5 – 8).

A number of the Unit Standards (a grouping of a number of specific knowledge and/or skills outcomes required) that were developed as part of the certificate courses served as basis for the development of a specialist Skills Programme for Catchment Mentors. Such a Programme, which is referred to as an Employable Skills Unit (ESU), offers a focused "extract" of a Certificate/Diploma course.

The working group that developed the unit standards for the courses, grappled with the issue of how to ensure international quality in the South African water, health and sanitation qualification, while allowing for access and redress. This was achieved by introducing entry levels, which will train learners in the fundamentals of water, health and sanitation while still allowing them to work in the industry to gain the experience required at higher levels. Two levels for water, health and sanitation have, therefore, been established. An entry level skills programme and the national certificates at level 2 and level 4 (The National Qualifications Framework consists of 8 levels). The skills programme on entry level is to introduce new learners to the sector to facilitate access to the national certificate for co-ordination of community water, sanitation and health. As there is a low level of literacy and numeracy in the water, health and

sanitation sector, the working group developed the entry level skills programme to assist new learners with the development of ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) skills.

The working group was unable to find any international community related unit standards against which to benchmark the South unit standards. It appears, therefore, that this initiative may also have application value on an international level. The fundamental components, reflecting foundational learning and generic skills and knowledge have been derived from registered, local adult education unit standards.

## 6 Outcomes of skills development

Skills development was provided to a 100 Catchment Mentors (30 within the Olifants-Doom, 41 within the Umzimkhulu and 30 within the Crocodile-Marico WMAs). The capacity building activities have ensured that all Catchment Mentors are competent against the national qualification entitled “Skills Programme for Community Water, Health and Sanitation” as well as the qualification “Skills Programme for Catchment Mentors”. This means that Mentors, assessed against the required outcomes, are allowed horizontal and vertical mobility within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The skills acquired by the Catchment Mentors allowed each to become actively involved in the catchment management process, both as active community representatives in catchment planning and development activities, as well as in facilitating community understanding of and involvement in local resources management. Specific interventions have included the development and implementation of community-based water resource management plans in each area as well as the practical implementation of initiatives for Water Conservation (WC) and Demand Management (DM).

Of equal significance is the fact that each of the Mentors has been placed in a position where they are profitably self-employed in careers utilising the specific skills, knowledge and experience gained through the project. In at least one of the Catchments, the DWAF procurement process has made it a requirement that external consultants include the skilled Mentors in an appropriate, non-exploitative capacity in catchment related projects.

It is believed that this project:

- ≈ Provided practical assistance in addressing immediate stakeholder concerns regarding water availability and use;
- ≈ Facilitated the empowerment of communities to engage with decision making institutions;
- ≈ Developed effective institutional linkages between local and higher level (catchment/ regional /national) water management and water services institutions;
- ≈ Assisted in changing institutional cultures and attitudes; and
- ≈ Directly addressed institutional and process barriers that had previously impeded allocative equity and poverty reduction.





## 7 In conclusion

Capacity building cannot be seen as a single discreet intervention. It must be regarded as an integral part of an ongoing process aimed at improving the ability of people to enter into a range of meaningful interactions within the context of IWRM and catchment management and to actively engage in seeking agreements and solutions that address his or her needs. Capacity building, therefore, not only addresses aspects of appropriate skills transfer, but the ongoing goal-directed pursuit of an enabling and supportive environment.

If all South Africans are to meaningfully participate in economic and social development as well as their own advancement, they must have general capabilities such as the ability to read and write, to communicate effectively and to solve problems in their homes, communities and in the workplace. But, given the demands of a more complex and changing economy, characterised by increasing use of information, more complex technologies and a general rise in the skill requirements of jobs, people must also have rising levels of applied competence. The focus on skills development in this project has been about the process of deepening the specialised capabilities of individuals in order to allow them to access incomes through formal sector jobs, through small micro-enterprises or community projects that, in turn, positively contribute to the economic success and social development of the country.

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