Local Government and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)

## Part II

# Understanding the Context – The Role of Local Government in IWRM

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# Imprint

## Local Government and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)
## Part II: Understanding the Context – The Role of Local Government in IWRM


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# Part II

# Understanding the Context – The Role of Local Government in IWRM

The set of materials entitled "Local Government and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)" aims to assist Local Governments with active participation in IWRM. The information provided addresses both the theory and practice of developing and implementing a process through which the IWRM principles of social equity, economic efficiency and environmental sustainability can be applied.

The materials are primarily targeted at Local Government officials, but are considered equally useful for individuals and organisations that work with Local Governments in the management of water resources.

The IWRM set of materials consists of the following four parts:

Part I: Reaping the Benefits – How Local Governments Gain from IWRM

Part II: Understanding the Context – The Role of Local Government in IWRM

Part III: Engaging in IWRM – Practical Steps and Tools for Local Governments

Part IV: Making Water Work for Local Governments – Ten Top Tips for Integration in Water Management

The materials are an output of LoGo Water[1], a research project aimed at improving the capacity of Local Governments to implement IWRM, thus contributing to the achievement of water-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The complete set is available to download from www.iclei-europe.org/logowater.

[1] LoGo Water: Towards effective involvement of Local Government in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in river basins of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, EC Contract 003717

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# Introduction

This document is Part II of a set of materials entitled "Local Government and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)". The document consists of four main sections. The first offers an introduction to IWRM, the second describes the governance of water resources, the third discusses the principles of good governance in water resources management and the fourth highlights the importance of stakeholder involvement.

This document is targeted at Local Governments interested in participating in IWRM. It aims to increase understanding of the relationship between governance, good governance and IWRM in order to provide the theoretical background that lies behind the implementation of practical IWRM steps.

Both IWRM and good governance are based on principles that are closely linked. Governance institutions, frameworks, legislation and policy at different levels form the structure within which IWRM must operate. If governance is flawed, the opportunities to apply IWRM principles become restricted. Well organised water governance that encourages social inclusion, stakeholder involvement, transparency and accountability will make it easier to create an enabling environment for Local Governments to develop integrated water plans.

# 1. What is Integrated Water Resources Management?

## 1.1 Definition of IWRM

Throughout the world, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is being promoted to help better understand, protect and develop water resources in a coordinated fashion, thus contributing to sustainable development. The Global Water Partnership defines IWRM as:

*"a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximise the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital eco-systems"* [1].

As pressure on water resources increases globally due to population growth, pollution and possible impacts of climate change, IWRM is seen as a framework for thinking about a more sustainable approach to the management and use of water resources.

The consideration of different aspects of water resources management simultaneously characterises the *Integration* element of IWRM. From a Local Government perspective, integration can occur in different ways, such as:

- the integration of social, economic and ecological considerations into the Local Government mandates that are directly or indirectly related to water resources;
- the integration of activities by different Local Government departments to increase performance efficiency and effectiveness;

[1] *Integrated Water Resources Management*, TAC Background Paper #4, Global Water Partnership Technical Advisory Committee, Stockholm: 2000, p. 22

- the integration of the views of a wide range of local stakeholders to generate a broad basis of knowledge and resources, strengthen ownership and develop more appropriate interventions;
- the integration of different water uses within local boundaries and with adjacent areas;
- the integration of local activities with those up and downstream; and
- the integration of future needs into current planning processes.

Such an integrated approach allows for a more informed decision-making process that considers the impacts of actions on other water users and ecosystems – and, vice versa, how other water users and ecosystem functions affect local water use.

Local Governments are well placed to take part in IWRM due to their proximity and understanding of the living conditions, economic situation, cultural traditions, social conflicts, etc., of the local population. An integrated approach requires a more detailed analysis of the short and long term social, environmental and financial consequences of taking alternative courses of action in many daily Local Government tasks – a pre-requisite for a better performance of regular mandates. The benefits resulting from such an integrated approach are addressed in more detail in Part I of this set of materials on 'Local Government and Integrated Water Resources Management'.

## 1.2 The principles of IWRM

Social equity, economic efficiency and ecological sustainability are the three core principles of IWRM and, simultaneously, the main goals to achieve. The three principles are closely linked and the overlap between them means that they are often difficult to separate. Figure 1 highlights the interaction between the principles.

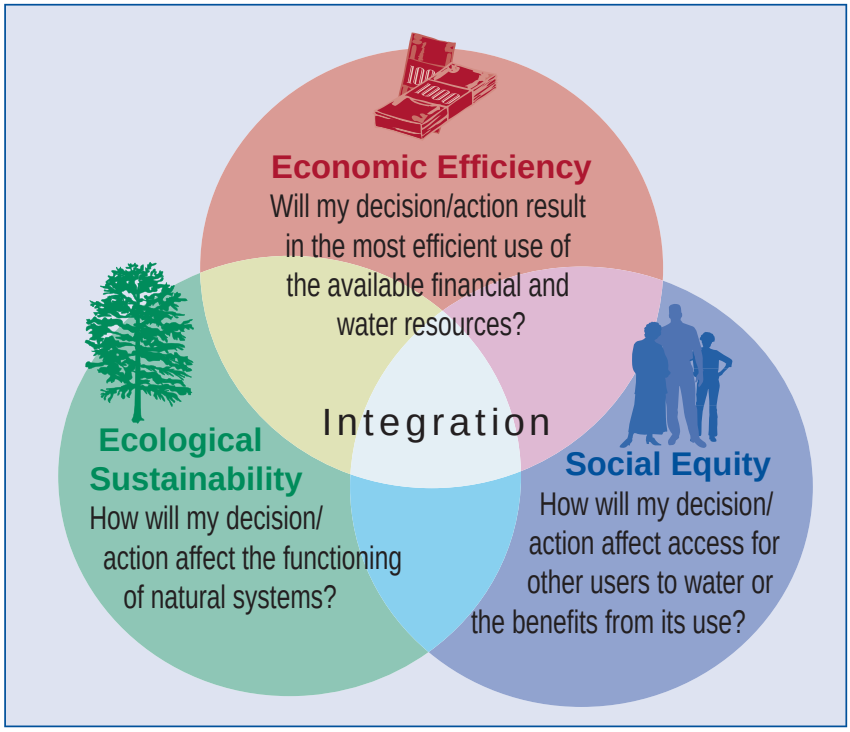


**Figure 1 –** The IWRM principles and how they interact

### 1.2.1 Social equity

The principle of social equity refers to the consequences of decisions and actions faced by different water users. The focus is particularly on ensuring equity in access to, and use of, water resources and the derived benefits. This applies to all social groups regardless of economic status, spatial location and individual characteristics of its members such as their gender, age, health conditions or level of income.

Social equity can, for example, be increased by:

- involving and consulting all water users and stakeholders in water resources decision-making to ensure more equal opportunity is given to voice needs and expectations, independent of economic power or social status;
- allocating available water equitably among all users to fairly distribute economic benefits, improve livelihoods and ultimately alleviate poverty; and
- reducing negative impacts from local activities on water users in up or downstream areas of the catchment outside Local Government boundaries.

### 1.2.2 Economic efficiency

The principle of economic efficiency addresses the need to make the most economic use of water resources to attain the highest value returns, thus achieving the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people. This value is not only a price issue, but should also include current and future social and environmental costs and benefits.

The principle of economic efficiency in water resources management can be taken forward by applying measures such as the following:

- adopting a precautionary approach to avoid shifting costs into the future;
- reducing or redirecting demands on water resources within the domestic, agricultural, industrial and public sectors; and
- recycling wastewater in order to use a unit of water with optimum efficiency.

### 1.2.3 Ecological sustainability

The principle of ecological sustainability recognises the environment as a user in itself and calls for maintaining the services that ecosystems provide. As such, water resources should not be depleted beyond the limits of replenishment by natural processes or human intervention. This applies not only to this generation, but also to the ones that follow.

Managing water resources while paying attention to ecological sustainability can be achieved through measures such as the following:

- raising widespread awareness of the vulnerability of ecosystems and the services they provide;
- promoting economic activities that have less damaging impacts on water ecosystems; and
- passing and enforcing regulation aimed at protecting the local ecology.

# 2. The governance of water resources management

## 2.1 Definition of water governance

A Local Government's ability to apply IWRM principles successfully very much depends on a favourable (water resources) governance framework. It is therefore important that Local Governments are fully aware of existing governance structures before embarking on the planning and implementation of IWRM actions.

Many different definitions of governance can be found in literature and policy papers. This document uses, as its basis, the term 'governance' as defined by the UNDP:

*"[Governance is the] exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. Governance comprises the complex mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences, and exercise their legal rights and obligations."*[2]

Accordingly, *water resources* governance refers to the system through which decisions on water resources management are made and enforced. This is explained in more detail in the following sections.

## 2.2 Elements of water governance

Following the UNDP definition, water governance can be described through different elements, namely:

- the various **institutions** formally responsible for the management of water resources;
- the **mechanisms** within which this management must operate; and
- the actual **processes** that are carried out to manage water resources.

Elements of governance can be defined at different administrative levels. These will vary depending on a country's political and institutional set up, although in general terms the basic elements are universal.

### Institutions

The institutions with formal authority in defining the binding frameworks for water resources management are manifold. They include government administrations and regulators at local, national and supra-national levels as well as agencies and organisations at catchment and river basin levels.

Other stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), water users associations, community-based organisations and the private sector can be involved in the system, but their influence is different in nature since they lack the authority of government bodies. They are, however, important vehicles through which interest groups can exercise influence over decision-making.

Local Government, as the level of government most closely associated with local affairs, is in a unique position within the water governance system. Although it has no direct mandate for water

[2] (UNDP, 1997)

resources management, it does have numerous mandates that are directly and indirectly linked to water resources. Local Government can also use its 'authority' to broaden stakeholder involvement in local decision-making processes, thereby enabling a more participatory approach to water resources management at the local level.

### Mechanisms

The mechanisms for water governance consist of the legislation, regulations and policies with which the management of water resources must be in accordance. Such mechanisms are usually developed at international, national and river basin or catchment levels.

As far as Local Government is concerned, the legislation formulated by National Government is likely to be most relevant. Although increased decentralisation provides Local Government with the power to develop its own bylaws and policies at the local level, these must still comply with the provincial, national and supra-national frameworks. Local Governments therefore need to have a good understanding of such legal and regulatory frameworks to avoid contravention and the consequent fines and penalties this could bring.

An example of an international framework for water governance is the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) revised Protocol for Shared Watercourses (SADC 2001)[3]. The Protocol aims to achieve closer cooperation and coordination in the management of the regions watercourses to advance the SADC objective of regional integration and poverty alleviation. At the national level, the National Water Policies of Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and the National Water Acts of South Africa and Botswana, for example, provide the framework within which water resources management in these countries needs to operate.

The mechanisms of water governance are only effective if enforced. Widespread compliance of the stipulated laws and regulations will only occur if a strong regulator is in place to carry out enforcement and ensure consequences are forthcoming when infringement is proven.

### Processes

The processes of water governance refer to the interaction between institutions and the application of governance mechanisms. Processes can be a range of measures associated with Local Government mandates that use water for specific purposes. Local Government must ensure that these measures are in line with the legislation and policies as set out in the relevant frameworks with which water resources management need to comply.

Governance processes at the local level are not limited to measures adopted in the fulfilment of mandates associated with water resources. Local Government is also the main institution in charge of regulation, integrated planning, stakeholder participation and conflict resolution at the local level.

As mentioned above, the processes of water governance refer to the interaction between institutions through which the mechanisms are applied. Such interaction can be, for example:

- The elected council of a Local Government takes the decision to establish a process for involving local stakeholders in water resources management.
- A regulating body evaluates an Environmental Impact Assessment of a land-use plan developed by a Local Government in an ecologically sensitive area.

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[3] This Protocol complements the framework provided by other instruments of international water law such as the Helsinki Rules on the use of the Water of International Rivers and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses.

- A municipal association organises a consultation process with its members to receive input for their advocacy on local water needs vis-à-vis a catchment management agency.
- A National Government task force investigates the impacts and challenges of decentralisation measures in the water sector at Local Government level to prepare a revision of relevant Local Government mandates.
- A regional water commission invites National Governments to identify new priorities for the adjustment of its policies based on the latest economic or social trends.

## 2.3 Levels of water governance

The system of water governance operates at different levels within two types of boundaries: administrative and hydrological. Administrative boundaries rarely follow hydrological ones, which often provides challenges in the system of water governance. Figure 2 demonstrates the different levels of water governance.

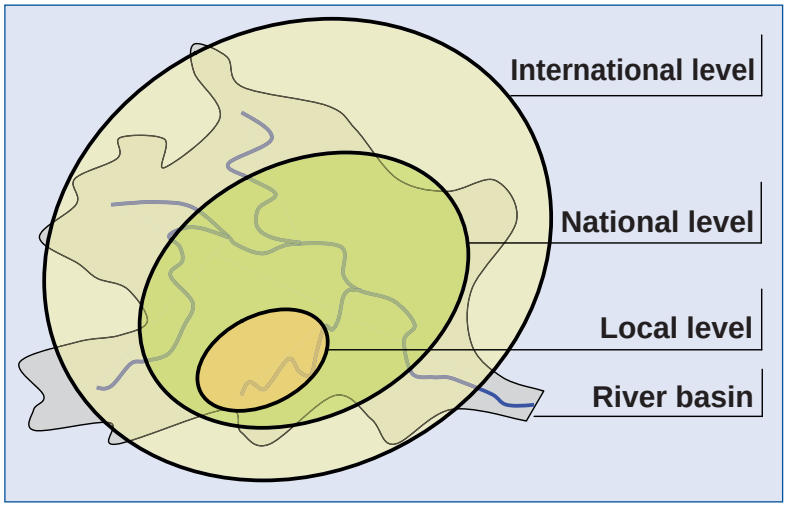


**Figure 2 –** Different levels of water governance

### 2.3.1 Administrative levels of governance

#### International level

In most countries, supra-national institutions such as SADC play an important role in the development of water resources frameworks through agreements between member states. Such agreements can, for example, stipulate water quality standards, initiate large scale flood management programmes and prevent the development of infrastructure that would negatively affect downstream users. The SADC revised Protocol on Shared Watercourse Systems (SADC 2001), for example, has been signed by each member of SADC and applied to national legislation. A smaller scale example is the establishment of a Tripartite Permanent Technical Committee between South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland to deal with the protection and sustainable utilisation of the water resources of the Incomati and Maputo watercourses (Johannesburg, 29 August 2002).

International institutions can encourage the application of IWRM principles, particularly the principles of ecological sustainability and economic efficiency. This is possible through multinational agreements to protect biodiversity and partake in benefit sharing of water resource development schemes. Local Governments are rarely directly involved in decisions and agreements

taken at the international level since this is the task of National Governments. However, the results can substantially impact upon their every day operations.

### National level

In recent years, many countries in the SADC region have made improvements in water governance at the national level, thus making it easier to put IWRM into practice. This has been achieved by adopting wide ranging new policies, the revision of water laws and the establishment of new institutions for water resources management.

> The South African National Water Act 36 of 1998 was drafted with the aim of reforming the law relating to water resources. The Act sets out the National Government's overall responsibility for the management of the nation's water resources. This includes the definition of the national water resource strategy which provides the framework for the management of water resources for the nation as a whole as well as the framework within which water will be managed at regional or catchment level, in defined water management areas.[4]

For Local Government, the rules set at the national level are the most relevant. Legislation and policies set by National Government form the national frameworks and shape the way in which Local Government can engage in IWRM through the definition of:

- mandates of Local Government;
- mandates of water resources authorities such as Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs);
- the mechanisms with which different levels of government can interact in water resources management.

### Local level

This level refers to a Local Government's area of jurisdiction. National authorities usually have the overall responsibility for the management of a country's water resources and large-scale infrastructure, such as dams and water transfer schemes. However, Local Government still plays a crucial role as a number of their regular mandates, for instance water supply, wastewater treatment, land use planning, etc., are related directly and indirectly to water resources.

The local governance system operates within the frameworks set at national and sub-national levels. Depending on the degree of decentralisation, Local Governments have a certain flexibility within these frameworks to create bylaws and policies. They can also use their competence at local level to extend participation in decision making to a wider range of stakeholders representing local water users and other water related actors, such as farmers, factory owners, fishermen, business people, representatives of community-based organisations, NGOs, etc. Stakeholder involvement is discussed in more detail in Section 4.

## 2.3.2 Hydrological levels of governance

### River basin level

Many of Southern Africa's large river basins cover multiple nations and numerous local administrations. The river basin boundaries rarely follow the administrative boundaries observed by National and Local Governments and the management of the basin as a whole must therefore function across borders. Trans-boundary river basin commissions have been established to manage international basins in Southern Africa, such as the Zambezi, Orange-Senqu and Limpopo. The

[4] South Africa – National Water Act 36 of 1998

interests of each National Government within the basin are represented within these commissions, which deal with high-level river basin development issues aimed at improving the management of natural resources that are relevant for the entire basin context.

> The Zambezi River Basin Commission is an example of a trans-boundary institution that involves multinational participation. The development of the Zambezi Action Plan[5] and the setting up of the Zambezi Commission has been accomplished to advise National Governments on the development of the basin. The Commission responsible for the Action Plan is made up of national organisations, institutions and agencies. Local Governments have a limited input although certain mechanisms for participation have been established.

In general, these river basin commissions limit their activities to setting out the overall development goals, but may also be engaged in negotiating water allocations between countries. In that respect, they set important boundaries within which national and local actors need to manoeuvre.

### The (sub)-catchment level

The planning, allocation and management of water resources is best coordinated at the catchment level. A catchment or sub-catchment refers to part of a larger river basin and is the level to which more and more important competencies in water resources management are being transferred in an increasing number of Southern African countries.

Examples of institutions in charge of water resources management at catchment level are the Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs) in South Africa and Catchment Councils in Zimbabwe. Typical responsibilities include the setting of regulations that specify how different local actors can participate in the deliberations and decision-making on water resources management at this level.

> In South Africa the passing of the Water Act[6] has resulted in the development of a national water resources strategy. This includes the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs) which have the responsibility of designing individual catchment strategies for the protection, use, development, conservation, management and control of water resources within their water management area. The involvement of Local Governments is expected within the CMA framework.

To date, Local Government involvement in catchment level institutions is not mainstreamed although examples do exist, such as in the Inkomati CMA in South Africa which has a Local Government representative as one of its board members.

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[5] Zambezi Action Plan Project No. 6 Phase II

[6] South Africa – National Water Act 36 of 1998

## 2.4 Implications for Local Governments

The different aspects of water governance at all hydrological and administrative levels define Local Government's role and responsibilities in the management of water resources locally. As Local Governments do not have a direct mandate for water resources management, they usually do not take part in the development of respective legislation and policies. This will consequently have an impact on their ability to successfully apply IWRM principles when carrying out mandates that are in any way related to water resources.

Local Governments should therefore seek out situations, where they can contribute to framework development and policy making at higher levels of governance. Local Government associations can be one channel through which this representation can take place at national level, as in certain cases these possess the necessary power and voice to influence higher level decision-making bodies. At river basin level it is more likely that National Government will represent local needs and it is therefore a challenge for Local Government to ensure that their interests do not become neglected.

Within the boundaries of prescribed legal and policy frameworks, Local Governments themselves have some leeway to adapt the governance structure locally to benefit local needs and conditions. This includes creating local legislation and policy and, especially, opening up the decision-making process to more stakeholders from whom a better understanding of local issues can be gained and additional resources and capacities derived.

In order to take advantage of such opportunities, Local Government should ensure that they have a good knowledge of:

- how water governance works in their country;
- their own position in the water governance framework and the degree of freedom they possess to set the rules at the local level;
- the local stakeholders with whom to share decision-making and other tasks in water resources management; and
- the scope to lobby for local needs and interests at higher levels of government through, for example, intermediary organisations and municipal associations.

# 3. Good governance in water resources management

## 3.1 Definition of good governance

Whereas a governance analysis is looking at the institutions, mechanisms and processes of water resources management in a more *descriptive* manner, 'good' governance is a *value-based* perspective. Depending on the specific values to be emphasised, a variety of definitions can be found each looking at good governance from a different angle of interest. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) definition of good governance has been chosen for the purpose of this document:

*"Good governance is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making."*[7]

Good governance is an ideal that can never be fully achieved, but rather worked towards. As with IWRM, good governance can best be expressed through a number of principles, such as social equity, transparency and accountability. The theory is that governance improves as these principles increasingly form the basis of the overall binding rules for policy implementation.

IWRM principles are easier to apply if a good governance framework is in place at all administrative and hydrological levels.

## 3.2 Principles of good governance

As mentioned above, working towards good governance is achieved by following the principles through which it is defined. In this sense it shares common ground with IWRM where the same applies. The two are also closely linked because good governance serves as an enabling framework for IWRM.

Figure 3 lists some good governance principles and their practical consequences in the water sector. These principles are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

### 3.2.1 Social inclusion

The notion of social inclusion refers to the goal that all social groups have equal access to water resources and associated benefits. In many cases the disadvantaged and vulnerable - such as the poor, elderly, disabled, people suffering from chronical diseases, or those living in refugee camps - may be deprived of access to these benefits.

Ignoring the importance of social inclusion can have severe implications. For example, not securing a safe and reliable allocation of water to a farming community belonging to a marginalised ethnic minority, will threaten their livelihoods and may force them to abandon their land. Or, as another example, the quality and success of the medical therapy for HIV/AIDS patients may be jeopardized when a respective health care centre does not receive the same water supplies as other facilities specialising in more 'accepted' diseases.

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[7] (OECD, 2001)

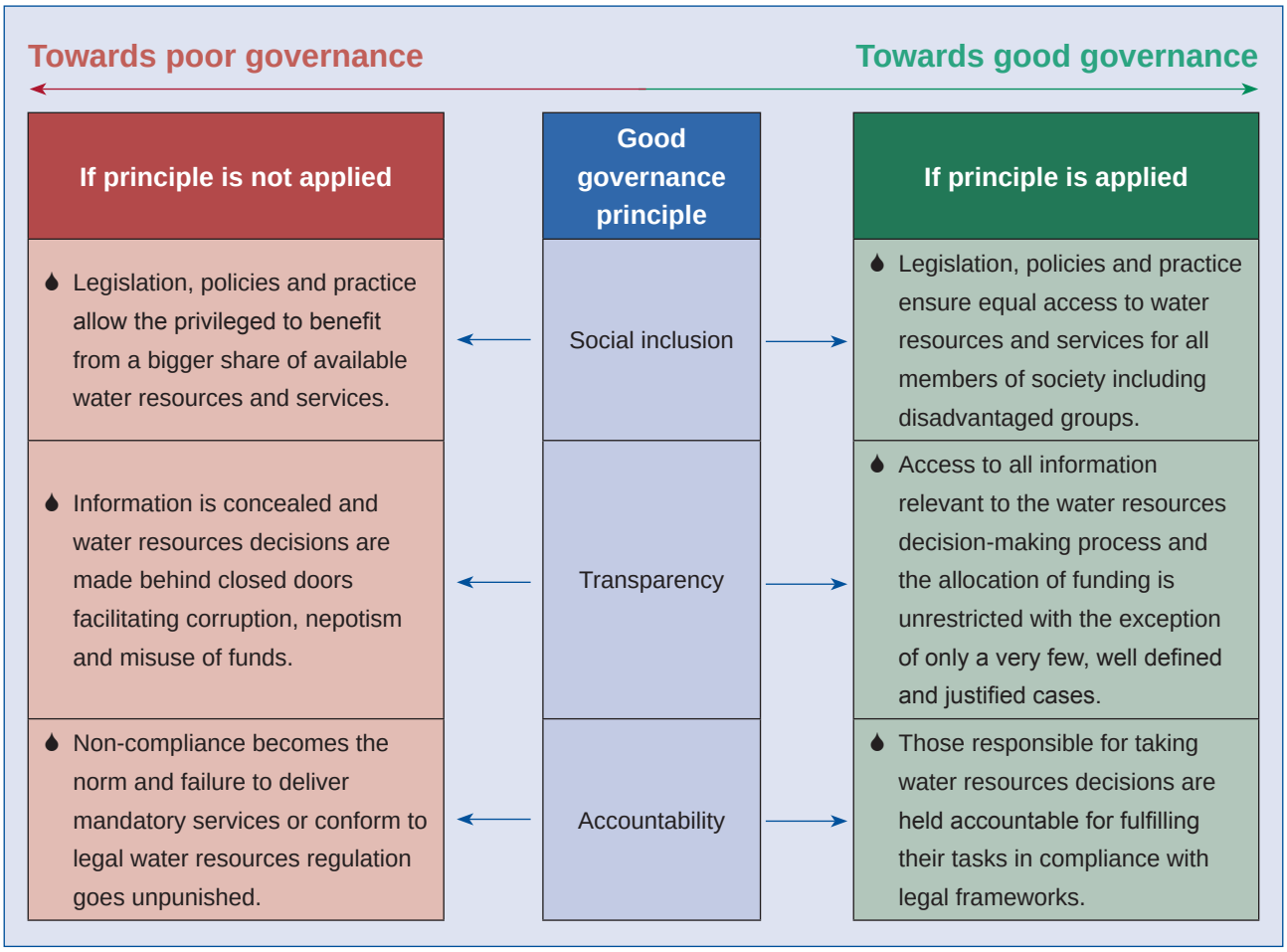


**Figure 3 –** The principles of social inclusion, transparency and accountability and their role in 'good' or 'poor' governance.

The public sector has a significant responsibility in addressing these imbalances and can do so by ensuring that water policies and legislation are non-discriminatory. However, it is not sufficient to rely only on such frameworks. In order to achieve tangible change on the ground, it is the application of frameworks in practice, or – in the case of laws – their enforcement, that make the difference. One option is, for example, to prioritise measures that respond particularly to the water needs and interests of disadvantaged groups. Among others, this can entail the reallocation of water supplies from locations in the community where they are available in abundance to locations where not even the minimum of water required per capita is provided. Through such measures, a Local Government can contribute to mitigating social disparities, thereby increasing social inclusion and equity, one of the core principles – and goals – of IWRM.

## Disadvantaged groups

Disadvantaged groups can be loosely separated into three categories of social exclusion:

- economic status – for example, those who lack resources and the ability and means to access services;
- living location – for example, those based in informal settlements; and
- identity-based discrimination – for example, those suffering from discrimination due to their health, age, gender, religion, race, etc.

These three categories are usually closely linked and an element of one will often be associated with elements of another.

Due to exclusion from certain community activities, networks and benefits, disadvantaged groups usually have little opportunity to be part of decision-making processes. This is also the case in the water sector where, despite being obvious water users, the interests and needs of these groups often remain largely neglected.

Empowerment is key to achieving social inclusion. Empowerment refers to the removal of barriers that hinder disadvantaged groups from being fully integrated within a community and gaining access to their fair share of the benefits provided. Such barriers can exist due to, for example, discriminatory legislation and policy, economic and thus financial issues, difficulties in communication, and less opportunities for education.

In order for IWRM to be truly operational and achieve its sustainability goals, Local Governments will have to exercise their authority at local level to ensure that no unsurpassable thresholds inhibit disadvantaged groups from making their voices heard. Stakeholder participation, capacity building, and prioritisation of the needs of disadvantaged groups are the main pathways for empowerment and can ultimately balance disparities and achieve more fairness in society.

When involving stakeholders in participatory fora, access for all main groups, independent of their social status, is key in order to achieve a comprehensive picture of the local situation and get broad support and commitment to solve the issues at stake (see also Section 4). Capacity building helps enable disadvantaged groups to lobby for their interests and contribute to the identification of problems and solutions on an equal basis with more powerful social groups. Prioritisation of their needs - such as focusing on water supply and sanitation requirements in informal settlements - can improve their living conditions in more direct and tangible terms.

Increased equity and justice will be an economic as well as a social asset for a community. Local Governments should understand this potential and put social inclusion as high as possible on their political agenda.

### Gender

In most cases, water needs of a local community are addressed as a whole without distinguishing between the different requirements of men and women. These needs may, however, be diverse and by ignoring them inequality in the access to water resources can occur. Gender is therefore a key area of social inclusion that, if addressed, can greatly reduce social injustice.

Women often have less say in the water sector than men, especially in societies where the roles and responsibilities of men and women are rigidly defined, with the role of women being limited to domestic water use. However, the productive roles of women outside of the domestic setting, for example in agriculture, industry or education, are equally important, but often remain largely ignored. This can cause problems for women in getting sufficient access to water for productive purposes, so that they are - in comparison to men - disadvantaged in the economic sector.

Another aspect of gender and water is the link between female education and sanitation in schools. A lack of gender separate and appropriate sanitation facilities discourages female attendance thereby depriving them of the opportunity to gain an education equal to that of men.

Good water governance therefore requires gender issues to be included throughout the IWRM process, especially when drawing conclusions and planning projects and actions. This follows the principle of social equity and results in more effective decision making, which can indirectly benefit economic development throughout the community.

### 3.2.2 Transparency and accountability

A transparent governance system, in which it is clear as to who is accountable for decisions and actions taken, is an important requirement for good governance. It is also relevant for the application of IWRM principles.

A lack of clarity concerning the reasoning behind decisions taken, the spending of funds, the collection and utilisation of information, and with whom the responsibility lies if things go wrong can open doors to corrupt practice, that is the use of a position of public authority for private gain. This creates a work environment where there is little incentive to carry out tasks effectively. In the water sector the result can be a lack of performance in the delivery of services as well as increased inequality in how costs and benefits derived from water resources are distributed. Ultimately, corruption can undermine economic development by generating inefficiency and deterring external investment in the water sector. Loss of public trust and belief in the creditability and legitimacy of public institutions usually follow.

Providing widespread access to information and treating it as a public good are crucial for both transparency and accountability. Access to information allows stakeholders to confirm the quality and validity of the data used in the decision-making process. This helps prevent misuse and false interpretation and clarifies why decisions were taken and who was responsible for them. Stakeholders can also play a substantial role in information collection by contributing their own knowledge to the process.

#### Transparency in decision-making

Good governance requires decisions to be taken in compliance with legal frameworks and in a way that those affected are aware of the process and have access to all available information. Transparency in decision-making helps to ensure that those not directly involved in the process are, nevertheless, able to understand and intervene. Information that should be freely available includes why water policy decisions were made, who will benefit from these decisions and the likely impacts of these decisions on the local community.

When decisions are taken behind closed doors, distrust and accusations of corruption can result. Those with a stake in water resources management are unaware of the motives behind decisions taken and will have no guarantee that such decisions were developed in the interest of the community as a whole rather than an elite few. A transparent procedure also reveals the stakeholders' role in decision-making and confirms that their input has been impartially considered and involvement is genuine rather than just for show.

#### Transparency in the use of funds

Transparency in the use of local and national funding for water resources is key in the prevention of financial corruption at the local level. The general public has a right to know how their taxes are being used, should be in a position to question this usage and, if necessary, should be able to request inquiries into what appears to be misuse or poor investment of public finances.

#### Accountability

Good governance requires that the key stakeholders, who have the authority to take and enforce decisions, are held accountable for what is decided. The legal framework within which the management of water resources operates should be clear to ensure that if water laws are violated consequences such as investigations, requests for justification, public hearings and ultimately penalisation can be, and are impartially, enforced on those responsible. If not in place, the result can be the neglect of duties and mandatory responsibilities, as failure to comply with legal requirements goes unpunished.

## 3.3 Implications for Local Governments

Good governance, based on principles such as social inclusion, transparency and accountability, is closely linked to successful IWRM as it provides the enabling environment within which a participatory approach to water resources management can best take place. However, at the same time, good governance reflects an ideal situation that is only partially realised in many countries.

A Local Government should not remain inactive if surrounding conditions are not perfect for entering into an IWRM process. Based on its competence at local level and taking advantage of the motivation of the local community, as well as the knowledge and interests residing in different sectors and organisations, at least some small steps for change are always possible.

A Local Government is responsible for *all* members of its community. As the sphere of government closest to the people in a given locality, it is in the best position to observe local situations and developments that require interventions. If there is evidence that certain groups are pushed to the edge of local society and are deprived of fair access to Local Government services, corrective actions must be taken. By working together with representatives of disadvantaged groups, understanding their needs and putting them higher up on the local agenda, major progress can be achieved towards a more inclusive local society.

In the same way, Local Government can make it part of their policy to emphasise transparency in all their decisions and actions independent of the priority given to transparency in higher spheres of government. Collaboration with local stakeholders cannot work if major decisions are taken behind closed doors and the public has reason to suspect that 'deals' are being made contrary to the overall interest of the community. Effective stakeholder participation requires a solid basis of mutual trust in the relationship between the public and the Local Government.

The proximity between a Local Government and the community for which it is responsible makes it easier to shape services in a way that they truly meet local needs and expectations. However, this proximity also has implications in the opposite direction, as the electorate is in a position to point the finger at a Local Government that performs badly in the fulfilment of its obligations. In smaller towns particularly, successes and failures are much easier to associate directly with the people, parties or departments responsible for them. Even personal meetings with leading decision-makers may in principle be possible. Additionally, local media has a major role in observing and commenting on Local Government performance. Local Government will therefore always face more of a challenge over being held accountable for their actions than higher levels of government that are more distant from their constituency.

To summarise, Local Government is well advised to avoid the likely risks – and costs! – of poor policies and management practices, both generally and in the water sector. Local Governments should place prominent value on the principles of good governance, a practice that pays dividends particularly through the benefits derived from working with stakeholders. Rather than relying on improvements at the national level, Local Governments can use their own sphere of competence to continue to strengthen democracy and justice at the local level and thus stipulate reform from the bottom up.

# 4. Stakeholder participation in decision making

As has been pointed out in previous sections the participation of representatives of all stakeholders in water resources management decision-making is a key requirement of good governance and IWRM.

A stakeholder in IWRM can be any group, institution, organisation, business or individual with an interest or role in water resources management. Users are the most obvious group of stakeholders, but others may exist, such as regulators. All of these have different interests, some of which can be contradictory, and therefore representation of all community stakeholders is important to understand needs and demands and also to form a shared agreement on the way that water resources are managed.

### The benefits of stakeholder involvement

The benefits of bringing all stakeholders on board are manifold and improve the likelihood of 'doing things right'. This is because a comprehensive stakeholder involvement can:

- help complete the compilation and understanding of data and other information on local water resources and their uses;
- provide a deeper understanding of local issues and contribute to identifying future priorities;
- draw attention to different or even opposing interests of stakeholders and help address conflicts before they escalate into major clashes;
- bring in more ideas, resources and capacities to share the responsibilities for managing water resources;
- create a sense of ownership within the local community for water resources management and development; and
- strengthen awareness on the true value of water for a sound livelihood.

### Stakeholder participation at different levels of governance

Stakeholder participation is essential at all levels of governance within both administrative and hydrological based institutions.

Stakeholder involvement at river basin level is important, as most rivers in Southern Africa are transboundary and the amount of water available to countries differs from plenty to none. It is therefore critical to ensure the understanding of neighbouring needs to prevent governments from making popular decisions to satisfy national interests at the expense of their neighbours. This can be achieved through the interaction of National Governments and other national authorities and bodies.

At national level, stakeholder involvement is usually realised through catchment level authorities. National laws and rules define the role of Local Government within this process. In Catchment Management Authorities and similar bodies, Local Government is just one of a wide range of stakeholders. Taking their role as stakeholders seriously, Local Governments should be eager to learn about and understand other communities' problems and interests elsewhere in the catchment. Contributing to Catchment Management Authorities is also an opportunity to advocate the interests of their own communities.

At local level, Local Governments have a certain flexibility to involve a wider range of stakeholders in the decision-making process. Doing so can provide the benefits listed above and is crucial for applying the IWRM principles.

# 5. Conclusions: What IWRM means for Local Governments

IWRM is often discussed at transboundary, national and catchment level with limited participation and representation of Local Government. However, the local level is key for making the reforms of water resources management work. For this, an effective contribution from Local Government is indispensable.

The success of Local Government involvement in IWRM greatly depends on the surrounding governance system that determines its mandates and responsibilities. The system varies according to the degree of decentralisation a country has established and other factors, such as historical background, colonial heritage and cultural traditions. Local Government must, therefore, have a good understanding of the governance structures within which they must work, as these not only define their opportunities in IWRM, but also their limitations.

Furthermore, it is important for Local Government to be well aware of their capacities and resources to perform their mandates in a satisfactory way. If this is not the case, Local Government should request clarification of the expectations directed at them and seek support from higher levels of government through, for example, Local Government associations.

Local Governments can further strengthen their readiness for IWRM by forging links and establishing coordination with neighbouring Local Governments in the river basin, possibly even beyond national boundaries. Doing so can help to share knowledge and experience, as well as contribute to a more rational use of water resources in the basin.

In all cases, regardless of the specific conditions under which a given Local Government might operate, there are always some possibilities, however limited, through which the status of local water resources in the performance of daily routines can be considered. Each Local Government can start with small steps, building on existing capacities in the community.

Politically, there is a lot to be gained for the local leadership. Broad stakeholder participation, taking also into account those groups that are often marginalised or excluded, can greatly increase trust in the Local Government. In the long run, information sharing, listening and responding to stakeholder needs and interests and involving them in implementation will enhance the benefits of IWRM and strengthen the community as a whole. Finally, local ecosystems will become more sustainable and provide a more viable basis for supporting the livelihoods of current and future generations. Local Government should therefore use their power to pro-actively shape the situation at the local level and become a role model for good governance, even if the overall system of governance is not ideal.

To summarise, it can be said that Local Government is in a favourable position to contribute to IWRM. Capitalising on its proximity to the local population and its living conditions, Local Government can use its power and rights to accelerate improvements in the management of water resources. This could be on a small scale and refer only to a few selected responsibilities; or on a larger scale, mainstreaming IWRM across all mandates through the implementation of a comprehensive local water action plan. The practice of applying the principles of IWRM and developing such action plans are the subjects of Part III of this set of materials on ‘Local Government and Integrated Water Resources Management’.

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Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is a hot topic. It is everywhere – in the media, on the internet, at conferences – and is a buzzword amongst governments, water institutions and NGOs. Is it just a current trend that will soon be forgotten or is it here to stay? More importantly, as an official of a Local Government – is it worth exploring further?

The 'Local Government and IWRM' set of materials has been produced by African and European water and Local Government specialists. They are convinced that IWRM in the long-term is both possible and the best way forward. It can only work with Local Government involvement, and Local Governments themselves need IWRM to optimise the performance of their mandates in the local community.

The 'Local Government and IWRM' set of materials consists of:

Part I: **Reaping the Benefits – How Local Governments Gain from IWRM**

Part II: **Understanding the Context – The Role of Local Government in IWRM**

Part III: **Engaging in IWRM – Practical Steps and Tools for Local Governments**

Part IV: **Making Water Work for Local Governments – Ten Top Tips for Integration in Water Management**

This publication is Part II of the series and is aimed at those who have an interest in understanding the relationship between governance issues and IWRM at the local level - an understanding that is crucial before entering IWRM into the local policy debate.

***Make your Local Government a pioneer in water sustainability – adopt IWRM!***

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