



**Supporting Local Government involvement  
in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)  
in the region of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)**

**- Briefing Note on IWRM and Local Governments -**

*This brief summarises the major issues which currently limit Local Government involvement in IWRM in SADC countries. It challenges decision-makers of Regional Institutions, River Basin Commissions, National and Provincial Governments, and Catchment Management Agencies in the SADC Region to recognise the important role played by Local Government in IWRM and to support them in fulfilling their potential.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

Currently, 40% of the population in the region of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) lack access to clean water and it is expected that by 2025 almost half of the SADC countries will be facing absolute water scarcity. This is in spite of the fact that sufficient water of good quality is available in many parts of the region. It is thus rather poor management and the lack of infrastructure that results in limited access to water.

In order to address this situation the political leadership of SADC adopted Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as the guiding framework for the water sector. Several SADC member states have responded by initiating water reforms in their countries in line with IWRM principles. These reforms include the development of a national water policy, legislation and regulations, and the establishment of water resources authorities on the basis of river basins as units of planning.

The governance framework reform process is still 'work in progress'. The greatest challenge currently lies in implementation – i.e. achieving tangible results. At current rates of progress, many SADC member states will not meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water, health and sanitation which are dependant on effective water resources management.

Local Governments are key actors for implementation in the water sector, through their mandated functions of water supply, sanitation and health. They can therefore play a significant role in achieving IWRM policy and goals established at a national and catchment level. In addition to being water users, Local Governments also influence the quantity and quality of water resources through other mandates such as town and land-use planning, local economic development and solid waste management. Furthermore, they operate at the interface of constituents and users and thus have the potential to influence user perceptions and habits through pricing, by-laws, communication and the provision of information.

Despite the obvious and important role that Local Governments can play in IWRM, their current involvement is limited and largely ineffective. Local Governments are often unaware of the concept of IWRM and see no reason to move towards such an approach. Even where the will to adopt IWRM exists, a lack of capacity and resources at the local level in many cases limits involvement. Despite their importance, such issues will not necessarily be brought to the attention of higher level IWRM institutions as Local Government is seldom represented and rarely participates in the development of policy and plans at either the catchment, national or inter-basin levels.

On the following page, key findings and issues that have been identified by the LoGo Water project partners as being responsible for the status quo are presented. These are mirrored in recommendations to the relevant SADC institutions at regional and national level aiming at realising the potential of Local Government to play a more meaningful role in IWRM.

**The LoGo Water project (Jan. 2005 to March 2008)**

'LoGo Water – Towards effective involvement of Local Government in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in river basins of the Southern African Development Commission (SADC)' is a research project aimed at improving the capacity of Local Governments to implement IWRM, thus contributing to the achievement of the water-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Further information about LoGo Water and access to the outputs from the project, including the 'Local Government and IWRM' set of materials, can be found at [www.iclei-europe.org/logowater](http://www.iclei-europe.org/logowater)



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KEY ISSUES AND FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS TO REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DECISION-MAKERS IN IWRM IN THE SADC REGION
<p><b>Lack of knowledge about IWRM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IWRM has only been introduced lately and is practiced in a diverse range of ways. It is often not really obvious to Local Governments what exactly IWRM stands for.</li> <li>IWRM tends to get confused with services for water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Local Governments thus focus on “usable” water associated with these services and are less concerned about the water cycle as a whole.</li> <li>Where they do consider water resources, Local Governments are mainly interested in the development of water resources to fulfil their primary mandate in service delivery. The protection of the resources, as required in IWRM, appears to conflict with their primary mandate.</li> <li>Local politicians are not aware of the benefits of IWRM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify the roles of Local Government in IWRM and their related mandates</li> <li>Develop and distribute information and guidance materials containing a simple, but comprehensive description of the water cycle and a clear and transparent definition of IWRM</li> <li>Highlight the benefits deriving from IWRM</li> <li>Involve municipal associations and other Local Government support organisations as multipliers in information and awareness raising campaigns</li> <li>Enable peer exchange at both political and technical level</li> <li>Promote IWRM training programmes for Local Governments</li> <li>Initiate and foster pilot projects at local level</li> <li>Award good local practice in IWRM</li> </ul>
<p><b>Limited capacity to engage in IWRM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decentralisation is at varying stages of development in many SADC countries and roles and responsibilities of Local Governments themselves, as well as between local, provincial and national government, are often not clearly defined.</li> <li>The necessary financial and human capacities and resources for taking up the new tasks resulting from this decentralisation process are often not in line with delegation of responsibilities.</li> <li>In many cases, Local Governments are not self sufficient or financially sustainable. This is especially a problem for smaller Local Governments in rural areas.</li> <li>In this context, IWRM appears to Local Governments as an additional requirement that falls outside their mandates and they are reluctant to engage in it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with municipal associations, researchers and finance experts to review and understand the effectiveness of the decentralisation process and to identify gaps and shortcomings</li> <li>Consider fiscal reforms to enable Local Governments to fulfil their tasks and thus contribute to IWRM goals</li> <li>Provide incentives to strengthen inter-municipal cooperation in order to pool knowledge and resources</li> <li>Involve NGOs and donors in capacity-building efforts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Little say in the development of IWRM policy</b></p> <p>IWRM has been defined by organisations such as SADC and the Global Water Partnership (GWP) at a regional level with the engagement of National Government, but with little or no inclusion of Local Government. These new frameworks and related policies do, however, have significant implications for Local Government.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make the voice of Local Government heard and thus get a better understanding of local conditions and implications of IWRM by developing policy platforms which include seats for the representatives of Local Government</li> </ul>
<p><b>Few entry points to IWRM institutions</b></p> <p>Joint water commissions are driven by National Governments and dominated by national agendas. Furthermore, national IWRM institutions do not dovetail with trans-boundary basin institutions. There is therefore a disconnect between inter-basin organisations and local IWRM institutions leaving Local Government with no entry point and National Governments with exclusive control over decision-making at both the catchment and local level as well as the international and inter basin level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the scope, mandates and decision-making processes in IWRM institutions at different levels and, if necessary, initiate reforms that can ensure that their functions become complimentary to each other</li> <li>Involve Local Government in all IWRM institutions to which their contributions are indispensable or which have significant impacts on their local conditions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of accountability</b></p> <p>National policy and legislation often embraces the principles of equity, sustainability and efficiency. However, implementation and enforcement of the legislation is poor. As a result, water users (including Local Governments) are not being held accountable for their actions, and the degradation of water resources continues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commit yourself to the rules of good governance and to sustainable development at all political levels</li> <li>Recognize legal compliance and outstanding performance of responsibilities publicly</li> <li>Encourage water user associations and the general public to observe compliance with water rules and to report misbehaviour</li> <li>Establish communication mechanisms to ensure that unlawful activities reaches the attention of officials in charge of protecting water resources</li> <li>Apply punitive measures where no alternative action is feasible to make your decisiveness to care for the sustainability of the precious water resources visible</li> <li>Invest income from monetary fines into strengthening IWRM institutions and improving mechanisms of enforcement</li> </ul>



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