

# Governance for Water Resilience: The Case of SafeWaterAfrica

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The SafeWaterAfrica initiative brings together different stakeholders to design, implement and maintain a decentralised water treatment plant.

Providing safe and reliable drinking water in informal settlements and rural areas remains one of the biggest challenges facing local municipalities. The use of conventional centralised water supply technologies in these areas is deemed expensive and technologically inappropriate given the developmental state of such areas. While local municipalities try to put mitigation interventions towards resolving some of the challenges, the quality of water still remains a challenge as local authorities struggle to tackle this challenge alone.

The aim of the project is to design, build, and implement a decentralised water treatment plant to address water service delivery challenges in informal settlements and rural areas by engaging and partnering with a diverse range of stakeholders from every sector. The project will be piloted in an informal settlement that is next to a major industrial area in Ekurhuleni Municipality, Johannesburg.

The communities affected include:

- Informal settlement residents worked with through the stakeholder engagement process,
- The local municipality who have to:
  - Supply informal residents with free clean and safe water
  - Ensure that they can afford to use the technology
  - Ensure that the technology fulfills the needs and wishes of the informal settlement residents
- Local stakeholders will be involved in facilitating the effective development and future deployment of the technology.

For water service delivery, localized decentralised solutions hold a potential to address the needs and aspirations of informal settlement residents but there are poor public perceptions of low-tech solutions and issues of equality around the provision of services.

SafeWaterAfrica is one of many initiatives that adopt new ways for managing water scarcity and water quality.

## **Water systems management and governance**

Water service provision and water resource management are a responsibility of the public sector, in particular water and sanitation delivery systems. But this is only one of many aspects of water governance by all stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and consumers.

With the increasing complexity of managing the effective use of water resources arising from factors such as changing rainfall patterns, urbanisation and its unintended negative consequences on the environment, including increased water demand, and failing urban infrastructure, there is a need to conceptualise and test new approaches for water systems management.

The Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach prioritises the inclusion and participation of non-government sectors in the governing of water and those using this approach have been successful in establishing stakeholder groupings such as water user associations and water forums. However, a number of water practitioners, civil society organisations and researchers have called for a different approach within the wider principles of an IWRM system. Their concerns suggest that it has been a challenge to ensure that all sectors and actors have a legitimate voice in water governance and decision-making. This in turn indicates that there is a gap between the intentions of water systems management policy and its implementation.

Re-thinking water governance and water systems management at local, regional, and national scale may mean that the roles of different stakeholders need to be reconsidered. The question is around how to design/implement/maintain bulk water systems in an inclusive and decentralised manner that includes all stakeholders and meets the needs of local contexts.

**Key strategic issues:**

- Over 50% percent of the global population lives in urban areas. This figure is expected to double in the two decades especially in African cities as rural migration to cities continues to increase. This brings about three major challenges for urban areas: environmental sustainability, inequalities, and economic growth. Johannesburg is one of the many African cities grappling with these issues.
- Informal settlements pose the greatest challenge for achieving equality, sustainable development, and economic growth. These areas often have poor infrastructure for water supply and drainage as well as access to electricity as well and lack of tenure security.
- All spheres of government and other concerned stakeholders have to work together to ensure provision of basic service delivery (housing, water, sanitation, and electricity), in order to contribute to the sustainable development of the metro area.

**Question: How can this ‘wicked problem’ be better understood and better addressed in the context of South African cities of the future?**