

Workshop 2nd July 2015, in association with the 2015 Southern African Society of Aquatic Scientists (SASAQS) Conference

Engaging Communities of Practice for Better Wetland Management

Objectives for the Day:

The workshop comprised three sessions that explored the influence of communities for wetland management at three different scales.

Participants included both those involved in wetland management in KwaZulu-Natal, more broadly in South Africa, from the neighbouring countries of Lesotho and Zimbabwe, and from Zambia and Kenya. This brought a rich mix of experience to the workshop, based on quite different social and technical traditions.

Outline of the day's programme was:

09:30. Arrival, registration and tea

10:30 Introductions and outline of the sessions

Session 1. Local scale: Wetlands for people.

Session 2. National Scale: Making policy work

Session 3: International Scale: Bursting the Bubble

16:00. Close and next steps

Session 1: Local scale: Wetlands for people.

Changes of wetland structure and use of wetlands is most acutely felt by local communities relying on wetlands for their livelihoods. The session explored community involvement for sustainable wetland management. Objectives of the session were to

- a) For selected case studies assess how wetlands practitioners could act as intermediaries between catchment-scale and community-based actions, for ongoing actions(the management cycle) and reflections;
- b) Share lessons learnt for effective and positive influence

The workshop participants formed three discussion groups, each of about 8 persons. Each group was first asked to discuss and summarise on cards: a) what worked; b) what could have been done better; and c) The key ideas or lessons that emerged from the stakeholder engagement. These initial outputs then formed the basis of a plenary discussion.

What Worked?

The successful experiences could be broadly divided into the technical and the social. Technical success involved

1. The application of appropriate tools, such as the techniques for wetland assessment as used by the South African Water Resources Commission (WRC).
2. A common understanding [among stakeholders] of how the ecosystem works.

Social successes highlighted were:

3. Listening to the communities and a focus on people, resulting in a balance of interests
4. Providing a vision and focus, that also meant being receptive to knowledge of others.

Both technical and social success seemed based on the capacity to work across different scales.

A key point that emerged in the plenary discussion was the idea of “conceptualising the elephant”. This was explained as imaging there is an elephant in the room, but individual techniques or stakeholder knowledge or interest can only visualise a part;

maybe only the trunk, the tusks, the ear, foot etc. This means that it takes a while to build up the full picture of an elephant, but very easy to concentrate on only a part, thereby missing the whole.

What could have been done better?

Interestingly some groups identified similar components as in the first exercise. These also included a focus on the stakeholders with recommendations that included:

1. Better understanding the dynamics of the communities, and focussing on the social aspects, with one comment that “people are key”;
2. Involving “appropriate” participation of relevant stakeholders, with a clear communication plan and feedback mechanism. This should apply to each group of stakeholders, recognising different interests and expectations;
3. Nurturing of a project to ensure long-term ownership by stakeholders, this alludes to the importance of continuity of projects and management. , Recognising who has the authority to make decisions and how this is manifested. Feedback to the relevant authorities with regards to experience on the ground, and linking to what is commonly termed the management cycle.

The latter point also highlighted the importance of understanding stakeholder power relationships and cross-compliance of policies, captured by comments for:

4. Better policy and institutional coordination improvement; and
5. Learning from other examples.

Discussion of these points also brought out the importance of understanding the context and boundaries of stakeholder engagement, and the “Art of Engagement”.

Key Ideas

The groups identified a number of key ideas they thought important for successful stakeholder engagement and wetland management. These included:

1. Mapping of stakeholders through stakeholder analysis, including institutional analysis. This provides understanding of stakeholder heterogeneity and perceptions.
2. Bringing diverse stakeholder groups into one room to identify (share) their needs, which not only informs the process but the stakeholders themselves.

3. Empowering, that also provides accountability, and mechanisms for follow-up that provides a relevance to the stakeholder process and clarifies roles and responsibilities.
4. The importance of having a Vision, that can include a formal strategic environmental assessment (SEA) that incorporates a much wider scale and context beyond a specific site. The relevance of scale was considered necessary to see the “bigger picture”, but also to identify the appropriate “meso-scale” actions, which are conducive to monitoring and planning, can occur. This also relates to relevant spatial planning and landuse compliance. it is common to ask “What is your Vision?” in the plans initiated by the South African Integrated Coastal Management Act, and for the Resource Quality Objectives (RQOs) for Water Resources in The National Water Act . Determining RQOs is a balance between the need to protect and sustain water resources and the need to use them.
5. The need of a champion or individual to act as an important catalyst as a common feature of success.
6. Don't DAD (Decide, Announce and Defend).

Session 2: National Scale: Making policy work

Fully developing and implementing the National Wetland Monitoring Programme (NWMP) presents a milestone for wetlands management in South Africa. The second session focussed on:

- Identifying the links and gaps between knowledge and policy for effective monitoring

This session was informed by the presentation of Laura Danga at the SASAQS conference earlier in the week on the NWMP. The workshop session identified a number of key questions related to implementation of the NWMP:

1. Buffer areas for wetlands;
2. Objectives for wetland resources, and their prioritization;
3. NWMP link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
4. The state of the South African national wetland inventory, mapping of wetlands, and links with river mapping;
5. Characterisation of wetlands;

6. The status of a reference wetland coverage, baseline data needs and data custodian(s);
7. Link with town planning urban green infrastructure;
8. Coordination needs;
9. Desirable, or minimum frequency for monitoring; and
10. Identifying risk of wetland integrity loss, linked to (existing) Drivers Pressures State Impact Response (DPSIR) framework, and how it informs the prioritisation of actions and monitoring.

There followed a discussion of the state of play of many of these issues and what would be the monitoring actions.

Key areas identified for further development were the ecosystem services that could be captured by monitoring, including socially-related ones; and the involvement in communities in that.

Linking wetlands with rangelands was recognised as important (as it is in many parts of the world, which is often as an open-access common pool resource), and how best to monitor them.

A wide range of techniques have been developed in South Africa for the assessment of wetlands (e.g. the WRC WET-Health tool, the WRC buffer tool, etc.). The NWMP provides an opportunity for further developing and testing of these 'tools', and simultaneously identifying capacity needs as the programme is rolled out.

Session 3: International Scale: Bursting the Bubble

Safeguarding wetlands requires collaboration beyond the catchment scale.

Wetlands can play an important but under-estimated role for priority development goals such as poverty eradication, food security and climate change adaptation.

Regional commissions and organizations increasingly influence policy agendas.

Objectives of the session were to:

- a) Introduce the concept and potential for Communities of practice;
- b) Identify the regional initiatives to support effective wetland management;
and
- c) Explore the benefits and opportunities for regional and international linkages.

The session began with a brief introduction of the wetlandsforum.net as an example of linking wetland workers within a Community of Practice, and a discussion of the challenges and opportunities for wetland management from examples from Lesotho (Sponges Project), Zimbabwe (Community Water Alliance), Zambia (WWF led initiative in the Kafue Flats) and Kenya (Kenya Water Towers); all of which have their particular context. These examples offered a wider understanding of the drivers of, and response to, pressures on wetlands in the region. Traditional approaches to wetland management are still practiced in many places, but shifting perspectives also offer opportunities for e.g. capacity building and application of more formal assessment tools.

Specific opportunities to influence wise use of wetlands identified by the workshop participants included:

1. Better use of Science to influence policies;
2. Influencing the political process;
3. Testing the effectiveness, and transferability of assessment tools (and communication techniques), including those measuring multiple pressures;
4. Rehabilitation of sites;
5. Promotion of demonstration sites;
6. Profiling the value of wetlands;
7. Networking;
8. Identifying Capacity needs, including institutional capacity;
9. Promotion and development of Community involvement; and
10. Better understanding of the spread and impact of invasive species.

Final Discussion: Outlook to Wetlands Indaba

The Western Cape Wetlands Forum (WCWF) and the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEADP) will host the 20th annual National Wetlands Indaba 2015. Dates are Tuesday 20th to Friday 23rd October, and venue is Goudini Spa in Rawsonville, near Worcester, in the Breede River Valley of the Western Cape. Theme of the Indaba is “Wetlands for our Future”.

The Indaba brings together the regional S.Africa wetland fora.

The ideas and interactions generated at the SASAQS wetlands workshop provides some input to the Indaba and future initiatives. Those discussed were:

1. Opportunities for better linking the various fora within S.Africa and with those across Africa;
2. Capacity building exchange programmes;
3. Developing S. African “Working for wetlands” demonstration sites;
4. Further focus on transboundary projects, such as offered by ORESCOM;
5. Linking better with Corporates and the Media;
6. Learning about regional initiatives, such as the Kenya Water Towers Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) scheme; and
7. Linking common interests of the SASAQS and the Wetlands Indaba, with e.g. relevant overlapping themes or sessions.

I thanked all the participants for their contributions to the workshop, Ian Bedin and Ellen Pfeiffer for help in shaping the workshop, and the organisers of the SASAQS annual conference for their support and hospitality.

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Websites related to the day's workshop

Wetland Portal of S. Africa - the central hub for all wetland related issues in South Africa. <http://wetlands.za.net/>

S. Africa Wetlands Indaba site: <http://indaba2015.wetlands.za.net/>

Pan-African Community of Practice wetlands site: <http://wetlandsforum.net>

Community water quality assessment using invertebrates:

<http://www.minisass.org/en/>

South African Water Research Commission. Contains assessment toolbox and news:

<http://www.wrc.org.za/>

Within the framework of the The Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM)

<http://orasecom.org/>, is the 'Sponges' Project, Lesotho.

<http://www.orasecom.org/system/writable/DMSStorage/551Final%20Report%20Sponges%2030%20October%202008.pdf>