

Perspectives on the Role of Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation in River Basin Management in South Africa: A Study of the Hennops River

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Abstract : As a country that already faces hydrological and climatological challenges, South Africa's socio-economic situation only complicates water resource management. This is observable through the state of rivers in the Gauteng Province such as the Hennops and Jukskei which are plagued by pollution from surrounding urban areas. While communities in the Hennops River basin contribute to its degradation, their potential in improved water resource management strategies is yet to be established. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the myriad of ways in which stakeholder and community engagement, mobilisation, as well as participation can be harnessed in contested urban spaces to facilitate a sustainable management system for river basins. Through meetings, clean-up campaigns, and a community workshop, the community of Tembisa and several key informants were engaged. The role of communities and their perceptions on an integrated and participatory approach to solving the Hennops River basin's current pollution crisis were therefore explored. The findings of this study suggest that meaningful participation is tied to the level of awareness within communities as well as the amount of support attributed to active involvement through the initiatives of stakeholders such as NonGovernmental Organisations. For meaningful participation to take place, more needs to be done to shift communities away from a "bystander" position to a more active role. An approach to community engagement is therefore proposed arguing for the further support of stakeholder-driven initiatives and the raising of awareness around environmental challenges in poorer communities. The findings of this study demonstrate the value of engagement with stakeholders and communities, highlighting ways through which better water management and environmental governance can be achieved in South Africa.

Keywords : community participation, integrated water resource management, river basin management, stakeholder engagement

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