

Report on the special session “multiple uses of water at the household level”

Held at the WaterNet/WARFSA/GWP symposium in Lilongwe, Malawi on 2 Nov 2006

Background

The concept of multiple uses of water (mus) is gaining more and more interest in the SADC region. This session, convened by the MUS (Multiple Use Systems) project, aimed to build upon this interest among the research community, with the objectives of:

- To introduce a conceptual framework for multiple uses of water (mus)
- To share and discuss experiences with multiple uses of water in the region
- To come up with a regional agenda for research and dissemination

In total 17 participants attended the session.

This report provides the main points which were raised in the session.

Introductory presentations

The session started off with three introductory presentations to the topic of multiple use services:

- The presentation of the background paper: “Multiple uses of water to enhance poor people’s livelihoods – relevance for the SADC region”, by Stef Smits (IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre)
- Building Multiple Use Water Services Into Integrated Planning in Bushbuckridge, South Africa by Vusi Dlamini (Association for Water and Rural Development)
- Policies and Institutions around Multiple Water Use Systems in Zimbabwe, by Fungai Makoni (Institute for Water and Sanitation Development)

These presentations introduced the background to the topic, and the conceptual framework of multiple uses. They highlighted that in order to provide water for multiple uses a participatory integrated planning approach is needed. The case from South Africa showed that at present local governments are struggling in doing such integrated planning. The SWELL (Securing Water to Enhance Local Livelihoods) approach has been proposed as a way of strengthening such processes. The South African case explained how SWELL was applied in the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality. A multiple use approach does not only require integrated planning at intermediate level, but also supportive policies at national level. The Zimbabwean presentation showed an analysis of policies and institutions, reflecting on to what extent they enable multiple uses of water. It showed that although some strides are made, there are still gaps in the policy framework to enable multiple uses of water.

The presentations raised a number of questions and comments from the participants, which can be grouped as follows:

- People do not always use water for productive purposes. So, sometimes that water is provided but people do not use it. Therefore, it is important to follow a needs-based approach. The SWELL approach seems to do that, as it starts from people's needs.
- In multiple use systems, by definition, use is higher than in domestic systems only. This means that higher operation and maintenance can be expected. The question is how to pay for that, as it becomes their cash cow. It was noted that although these costs can indeed be higher, there may be more willingness and ability to pay because of these productive activities. But in order to ensure that, a thorough participatory approach needs to be followed. It also raises questions on the price and tariff setting of water. If it becomes too expensive, nobody will use it for productive uses.
- Multiple uses does not only require ownership of the services, but also entrepreneurship. So, next to providing water services, people require skills to be able to put the water to productive uses.
- It is felt that in areas where water is scarce multiple uses of water may not be feasible. But, it is also true that the amounts required for small-scale productive uses are not that high, especially compared to other uses. The most important though, is that a good assessment is done of available water resources, including non-conventional resources, as part of the multiple use approach.

After this, a short brainstorm was held about potential areas of research to take multiple uses of water forward in the region. These can be grouped as follows:

- Research into the dynamics at community level. This refers especially to the social dynamics within communities, on how they access water, manage water, deal with conflicts, but also to the financial dynamics of willingness and ability to pay, and manage financial resources. On the basis of such research, options for multiple uses at local level can be presented.
- Research into mechanisms for integrated planning at district level. How can different service providers and institutions provide integrated responses to communities' needs, and support communities in different aspects of water management? Research is needed into mechanisms and procedures to do this.
- Related to the above is the strengthening of capacity of these district level organizations. Researchers can play an important role in such capacity strengthening activities.