

Turning concepts into community driven catchment water management solutions: Foreword to the special HELP edition[#]

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Background

This special volume consists of selected papers from the Symposium titled 'HELP in Action: Local Solutions to Global Water Problems – Lessons from the South' which was held at the Emperor's Palace, Johannesburg, South Africa from 4 to 9 November 2007. This symposium was ably hosted by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) South Africa, in partnership with the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Water Research Commission (WRC), the Water Institute of Southern Africa (WISA) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

HELP is an acronym for the Hydrology for Environment, Life and Policy which is a crosscutting programme under the International Hydrology Program (IHP) of UNESCO. The HELP programme was initiated by the international hydrological research community and adopted by UNESCO and WMO in 1999. HELP is designed to develop scientific research in the application of integrated water resource management (IWRM) through a global network of catchments to improve the links between hydrology and the needs of society. It seeks examples of good solutions-oriented science which can deliver real outcomes and impacts to real people in real catchments to address real problems, locally as well as globally.

HELP philosophy can be best illustrated by reference to Gibbons et al. (1994) who distinguish two approaches to knowledge production: traditional research is Mode 1, in which there are narrow fields of study and separate roles, with academics developing the knowledge and passing it on to the practitioners. In Mode 2, knowledge is produced by a trans-disciplinary team that includes the practitioner, and the learning is immediate for all - it is part of the discovery process. The role of the practitioner is central to Mode 2 throughout the entire research process. The HELP initiative is encouraging Mode 2 knowledge generation and adoption.

Currently there are 67 HELP basins across the globe (in Australia, Asia, Africa, North America and Latin America (www.unesco.org/water/ihp/help/)) to demonstrate how HELP principles can be put in practice. These basins are divided into 4 categories based on the level of development in relation to the ideals of bringing all aspects of water use together - people, production, environment, policy and science. The current HELP Network involves more than 50 Member States of UNESCO.

The Symposium offered a review of progress towards the implementation of Integrated Water Resource Management by

taking a stock of over 8 years of HELP activities in real catchments while seeking real solutions with real people building on earlier successes (e.g. Andersson et al., 2004; Falkenmark, 2004; Khan, 2004 and Schulze et al., 2004). The learning and sharing of best practice experience amongst HELP basins have greatly benefited attempts as a global community to improve the sustainable management of water resources through continuous dialogue and involvement of stakeholders from the community to government level.

Over 180 delegates from 26 countries attended this symposium. These delegates widely represented the key target groups as given below:

- Water stakeholders in general [Consumer groups; farmer associations; in-stream interests (including fisheries); NGOs; industry, mining, forestry; medical profession (water & health); municipalities; tourism; journalists]
- Decision-makers [politicians in Governments (federal/state); policy-makers in Departments of Water (Management) and the Environment (pollution control); industrial leaders]
- Water managers [municipal engineers; irrigation engineers; water supply and sanitation specialists; wastewater treatment specialists]
- Scientists [hydrologists; ecologists; social scientists; legal scientists].

The Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, South Africa, Mrs LB Hendricks, extended a warm welcome to all attendees and hailed the convergence of all the separate disciplines under one roof as the sure path to a holistic understanding of the true meaning of an integrated catchment management approach. She elegantly captured the HELP approach as below:

'South Africa and the developing world, mainly in the South, generally have much to teach the developed countries (i.e. North), and on the other hand the developing countries (i.e. South) have much to learn from the developed countries in a two-way process. Such learning and shared experiences could greatly benefit our attempts as a global community to improve the sustainable management of our water resources in a truly integrated manner.'

Overview of this special issue

Peer reviewed papers from the Symposium included in this special edition include examples of how HELP basins have achieved real solutions in real catchments while working with real people facing complex challenges. The paper by Van Koppen (2008) reports a critical analysis of the continuities and changes in water management in the Olifants basin after the first decade of implementation of the National Water Act. Anderson et al. (2008) provide details of how participatory scenario modelling can lead to effective stakeholder dialogues in the Motla Ström River basin. Fenimore et al. (2008) have illustrated how Motueka catchment stakeholders have been engaged in longer

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