

Facilitative guidelines for municipal officials,  
policy-makers, and community leaders

# INTEGRATING WATER AND SANITATION COMMUNITY FORUMS INTO MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICA





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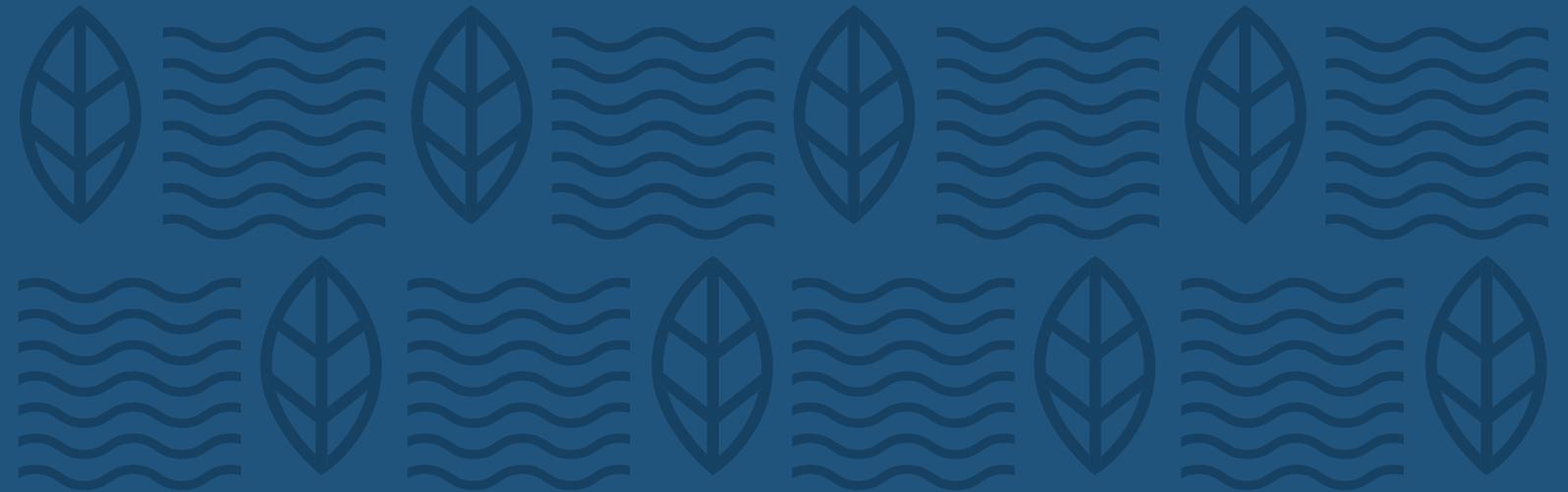
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**Guidelines for Water and Sanitation Community Forums,  
municipal officials, and other decision-makers to integrate  
participatory planning into Integrated Development Plan and  
Water Services Development Plan processes.**

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Water Research Commission Research Project C2020/2021-00538

Entitled

Institutionalizing inclusive community-led planning of water supply in  
Water Services Development Plan (WSDP) and Integrated Development Plan  
(IDP) Frameworks



SP 173/24



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# About this guideline

This user-friendly guideline is aimed at municipal officials, local decision-makers, policymakers at national and sub-national levels, and water and sanitation community forum leaders, providing simple and practical methods for integrating participatory planning into the Integrated Development Plan and Water Services Development Plan processes.

## Executive Summary

In addressing the persistent gaps in water and sanitation access in both rural and urban areas of South Africa, Water and Sanitation Community Forums (WSCFs), supported by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), play a crucial role in ensuring community participation and avoiding conventional 'parachute projects'. This guideline, supported by the Water Research Commission (WRC) and implemented in collaboration with the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), other support agencies, and academia, places the WSCFs at the forefront of inclusive, community-led water supply planning and their institutionalization in the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and Water Services Development Plans (WSDPs).

Based on experiences of eight WSCFs in Vhembe and Gauteng, the guideline outlines lessons learnt at community-scale and at municipal scale of Water Services Authorities (WSA) and other support agencies (e.g., NGOs, private sector) on how communities and officials can meet each other half-way to realize what either party can do on its own. At community-scale three key replicable approaches in providing actionable solutions are distinguished: municipal systems (post- and pre-construction), supported self-supply and other water and environmental projects. At the scale of municipal Water Services Authority (WSA) and other support agencies, the guideline recommends the institutionalization of the community voices, represented by WSCFs, within political and administrative frameworks to leverage technical, financial and institutional support. Through strategies such as prioritizing political buy-in, also by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), fostering coordinated and sustainable relations, the water components of IDPs in Water Services Development Plans will be strengthened from local to national level and vice versa,

Despite commendable achievements, WSCFs face challenges such as lack of visibility and budget constraints. To overcome these, the guideline recommends advocating for capacity development, formal recognition, and reasonable financial support both by enhancing collaboration through IDP processes and through partnerships with NGOs and private sector.





# 1. Who are the WSCFs?



***We are like a tree; we have our good and bad seasons.”***

## Community Mobilization:

The Water and Sanitation Community Forums mobilize community members for labour, sharing knowledge, community dialogue and joint study and capacity building. They are entry points for government and other support agencies for their awareness raising campaigns and civic education, among others. This keeps their communities informed and engaged in important matters. WSCFs can also interpret government water policies and even international treaties to inform their constituencies. Inclusion of youth mobilizes their intelligent and visionary leadership, for example in community gardening, school awareness campaigns, river cleanups, and other activities.

## Support and Recognition:

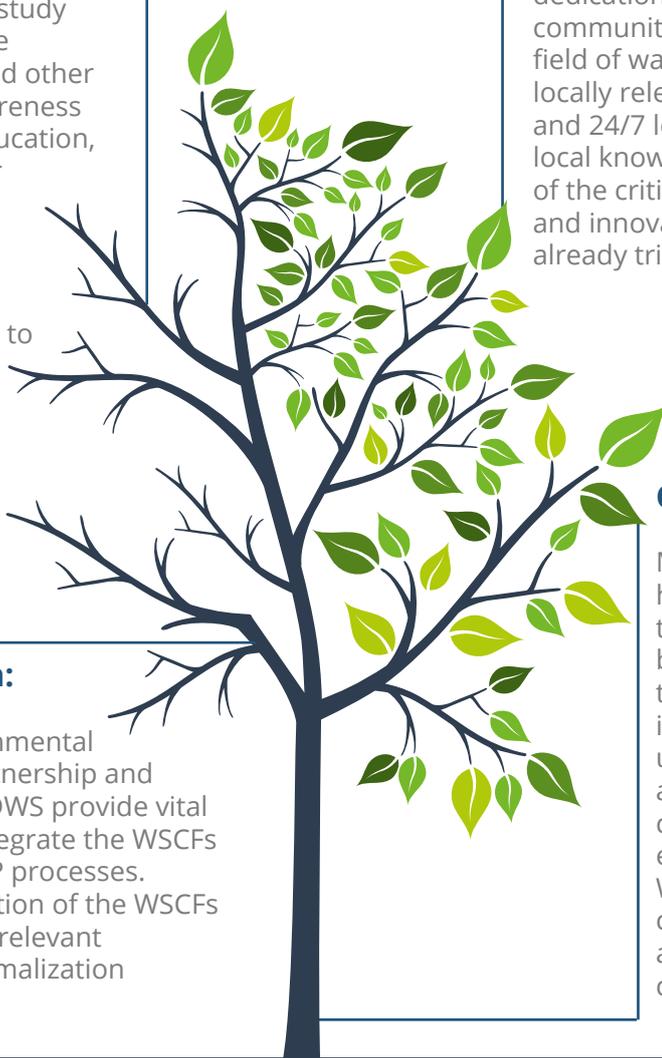
The Directorate of Inter-governmental Cooperation and Strategic Partnership and designated provincial staff of DWS provide vital support. DWS also seeks to integrate the WSCFs in the municipal IDP and WSDP processes. However, visibility and recognition of the WSCFs is still weak, also among other relevant government departments. Formalization of WSCFs is limited.

## Voluntary Commitment:

Largely working voluntarily, current WSCFs are driven by passion, dedication, and pride to serve community cohesion in the broad field of water and environment, as locally relevant. With long-standing and 24/7 local presence, they have local knowledge and are fully aware of the critical problems, solutions and innovations that they have already tried and found.

## Capacity Building:

Many forum members have not received training or capacity building. Yet, participation in the forums already improves their understanding and skills to analyse and tackle community water issues effectively. Participation in WSCFs gives courage and confidence to pro-actively address challenges in their communities.



## Challenges to Sustainability

Most of the time inputs and efforts are still voluntary, rooted in dedication and passion, and driven by personal relationships and 'champion' leaders. However, when such leaders move on, or retire, sustainability is at risk. Solving local water problems remains the main incentive. When those also remain unsolved, members may leave.



## 2. Local co-management modalities

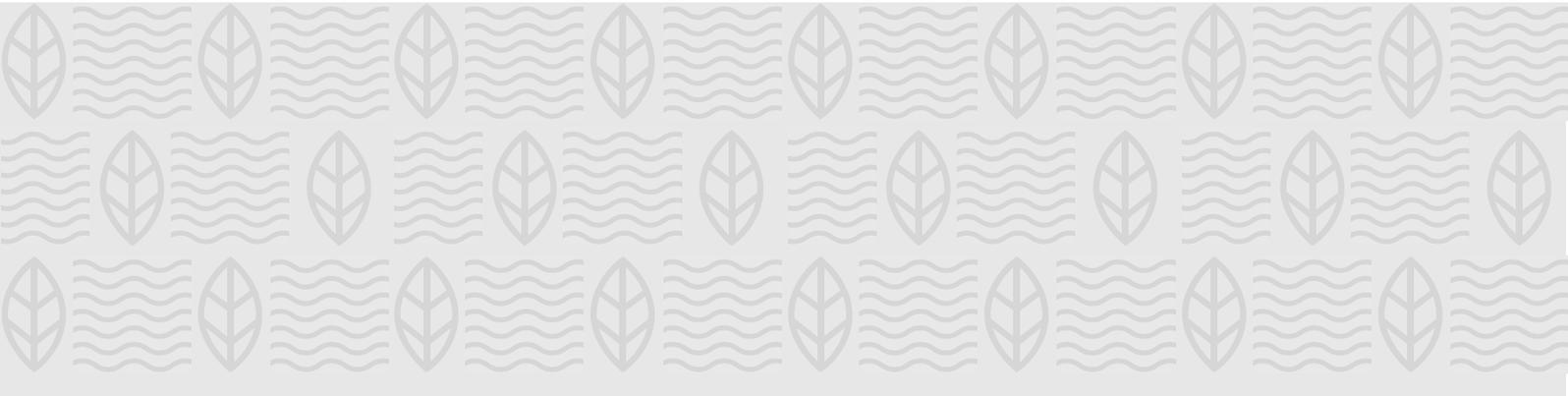
The Water Research Commission (WRC)-funded project, implemented by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) in collaboration with DWS, has identified three co-management modalities that harness community agency and are essential for achieving sustainable and cost-effective public water services delivery in South Africa. These modalities aim to bridge the gap between communities and the government by fostering a shared vision, promoting transparent communication, empowering communities in decision-making, sharing resources and knowledge, building local capacity, formalizing recognition of community contributions, and maintaining adaptability to address water challenges effectively. Here are the three co-management modalities:



For more information on the modalities, have a look at this video:





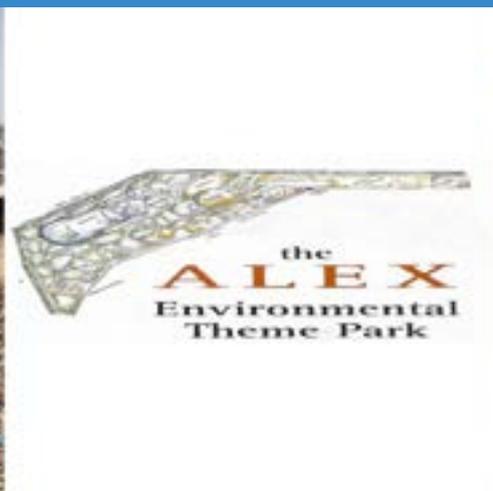


## 2.3 Modality 3: Other water, sanitation and environment initiative



### A: Involve communities in other water, sanitation and environment initiatives

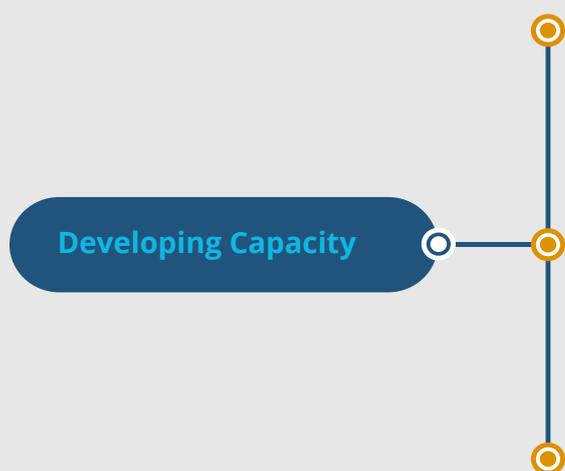
Similar community-led planning, implementation and involvement of WSCFs holds in other publicly supported water-related initiatives, for example, wastewater treatment, water purification, environmental protection, water in schools or hospitals, disaster management, climate change programs, youth involvement and general development and employment creation. WSCFs can also raise concerns and expose pollution, flooding, or other life-threatening risks. DWS or other government departments, NGOs, churches, private sector, development banks and charity funds offer support within their respective mandates, funding earmarks and expertise. WSCFs are particularly interested in co-management with the private sector.



## 2.4 Developing capacity to strengthen the local co-management modalities

### Provide institutional, financial and technical training

In all local co-management modalities, whether communities' partner with municipalities, other government officials, NGOs, private sector, or others, the latter meet communities and WSCFs half-way by providing support in kind (expertise, equipment) and in cash as (partial) grants. The transparent management of the resources requires institutional training and capacity development. Transparent internal organization includes clarity, for example by workshopping a constitution, on issues like membership, leadership, roles, responsibilities, reporting back to communities, monitoring, and evaluation. Skills in business plan development and financial literacy are also required. These transparent internal arrangements mitigate and avoid rumors, internal competition, and jealousies within communities.



Roll-over the Icon to reveal information

Water and environmental co-management also require technical training, especially of women and marginalized men, to design, construct, maintain and repair more complex technologies. However, other training, for example, handwashing campaigns, can be fruitless when there is no access to water.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned concrete improvements in accessing water at larger scales than a particular community of a particular WSCF member, WSCFs also play a pivotal role in upscaling these solutions at the higher local or district government, provincial, national and even international levels. The guidelines now turn to recommendations on how WSCFs can represent community voices in existing institutional frameworks of DWS and Water Services Authorities, IDP and WSDP processes and other ways to transform public and private support agencies at these higher levels, so they meet communities' half-way at much larger scales.



# 3. Integrating in local, district and national level IDP, WSDP and other support frameworks

## 3.1 Three approaches to integrating WSCFs in municipal Water Services Authority structures



## B. Integrating in political structures and IDP processes



Bottom-up establishment of sustainable contacts, relationships, and communication with councilors and local or district municipalities and other stakeholders is key to ensure that community voices count in WSAs. However, establishment of such relations takes many efforts. As a WSCF member says: "It is necessary to navigate politely and adapt to the ways they want to operate". Much depends on personal relationships with a local councilor. That person may leave again. Or changes in political leadership disrupt these relationships as new officials come in. For continuity in engagements from old to new municipal administrations, contacts with the entire municipal office, including individuals like safety officers or security guards, are found to help

Water services is one of the local issues raised, often as a priority issue. IDP processes are the formalized venue to establish those contacts. IDPs are designed to mobilize community voices and agency to inform the higher-scale political structures. Politicians, at their turn, with support of CoGTA and DWS, mobilize funding and the technical expertise of water departments to deliver on these needs.



When ward councilors or community development workers at local levels are members of the WSCF, they are at least informed. They can also provide precious advisory services. But they may also remain silent. Other WSCFs may have no ward councilor or community development worker at all. Establishing relationships with local government is easiest when municipalities are willing when this is done from the very beginning onwards when new WSCFs are started or revived.

As shown in Vhembe, it significantly accelerates institutionalization in local government structures and IDP frameworks, when these bottom-up efforts are complemented by high-level coordination and top-down encouragement, also at national level. WSCFs wonder whether DWS can facilitate a meeting with SALGA on the recognition of the forums; or pro-actively invite councilors and community workers to WSCF meetings. As part of the IDP processes, specific water working groups can be set up. DWS also seeks collaboration with CoGTA. Sharing and explaining project plans, budgets, progress reports and asset management plans with WSCFs provides mutual transparency and enables social accounting. Regular monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of programs allows identifying areas for improvement.



## C. Informing the WSDPs



WSCFs can communicate municipal programs to their communities and provide bottom-up feedback. Joint activities by WSCFs and municipalities from local to district level, at their turn, inform the Water Services Development Plans (WSDP), so that the WSDP supports community voices, for example by participating in WSA budgeting processes.

Formal legal recognition would significantly strengthen their decision-making power in such budgeting and in other municipal meetings where billing matters and broader political agendas are discussed. They can also follow-up and monitor compliance with the strict conditions for effective, transparent spending for envisaged performance across tiers. In these roles, WSCFs would complement the technical expertise of engineers with their institutional and administrative insights in water services delivery.



In addition to a focus on municipal systems and Water Services Authorities, within the IDP and WSDP frameworks, CoGTA and with DWS support, WSAs can also support self-supply and other water related initiatives. Such support is also provided by other government departments than DWS and CoGTA, including NGOs, private sector and donors.

Coordination and alignment with IDPs can overcome sectoral silos and significantly improve performance. However, even if such coordination does not exist, or not exist yet, WSCFs can also meet half-way in initiatives that are (still) more or less independent from municipal structures. The following are some examples:



## 3.2 Integrating WSCFs in other support initiatives from local to international level



# 4. Enhancing visibility and formalizing

## 4.1 Enhancing exchange and visibility

Currently, most WSCFs lack sufficient visibility and recognition of their voluntary and dedicated work. WSCFs hardly even know about each other. More mutual exchange about their experiences, challenges and solutions, also by visits, enables WSCF to further articulate their voices and take the driver's seat at higher levels as well.

Government and non-governmental stakeholders at higher levels still need to know WSCFs better and take them more seriously. These stakeholders, at their turn, should educate the WSCFs on relevant policies and regulations to ensure mutual understanding and develop skills for collaboration.

Some WSCFs already actively communicate. A best practice example is the WSCF of Alexandra, Gauteng. Playing an activist role to raise awareness among those willing to listen, this forum expanded its communication efforts to strategically convey their

identity and water and sanitation challenges and solutions, reaching newspapers, social media, television, and radio platforms such as Power FM, Alex FM, Moja Love TV channel, and other mediums. In contrast, other WSCFs received invitations from media channels, but had to decline due to a lack of training on what to communicate and how to interact with the media effectively. The DWS communication team can assist in such training.

Officials can enhance the visibility of WSCFs by sharing success stories and showcasing WSCFs at events, such as the WISA conference, and by celebrating successful collaborations and achievements publicly. Recognition programs or awards can be established to motivate and appreciate their efforts. Documentation and case studies corroborate such sharing and learning about WSCFs' efforts to achieve constitutional commitments.

## 4.2 Fit-for-purpose formalizing

Currently, most WSCFs operate voluntarily, and most mutual arrangements are informal and oral. There are limits to what can be expected through volunteerism. For community-scale co-management an important reward is improved access to water, new skills and knowledge. However, for responsible daily work by operators, some reasonable compensation ensures continuity. Reimbursement of factually made costs for transport, food, or communication is justified certainly when engagements at higher levels primarily benefit other communities and assist government to meet its mandates at larger scales.

Remuneration comes with conditions. It can oblige receivers to observe transparency and accountability. Within communities, criteria and processes are to be clarified, among other, for membership, recruitment of local technicians for local jobs, elections or appointments of leaders, and transparent reporting back to the community. Community meetings to discuss and write a constitution may sufficiently fit the purpose. Arrangements between a WSCF and external support agencies depend on the purpose and existing contractual arrangements of the agencies concerned. There is no one-size-for-all; further trial and error,

discussion and study will learn. However, general arrangements hold. Pledges, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), written partnership agreements, or bilateral contracts, e.g., for construction or small-scale repairs, can outline the terms of collaboration. These include shared objectives, commitments from all parties, clarification of roles and responsibilities of each party involved, including community forums, municipalities, other government officials, or other parties. Everyone should understand and agree with their specified roles.

Further, regular meetings and communication channels enable all stakeholders to discuss progress, share updates, and address any issues or challenges. These meetings can include formal gatherings, workshops, or even virtual communication platforms to accommodate everyone's availability. A robust monitoring and evaluation system can assess the performance of the WSCFs and the impact of their initiatives. With this feedback, necessary adjustments in planning and implementation can be timely addressed. Lastly, clarification of decision-making processes and lines of authority can avoid conflicts or ensure prompt conflict resolution and dispute management mechanisms, for example by a joint committee.



## 5. Conclusion

The collaborative efforts of Water and Sanitation Community Forums (WSCFs) stand as a pivotal force in addressing the persistent challenges of water access, particularly in low-income rural and urban contexts. As showcased in the 'Institutionalizing inclusive community-led planning of water supply in IDP and WSDP frameworks' project, supported by the Water Research Commission (WRC) and Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), the WSCFs play an important role in filling the gaps left by traditional, top-down approaches. The guideline outlined actionable strategies for the successful integration of WSCFs into municipal Water Services Authority structures, emphasizing community participation, political buy-in, and adaptability.

While recognizing the achievements in community-led initiatives, the guideline highlights ongoing challenges such as budget constraints and infrastructure planning inadequacies. The recommendation to advocate for formal recognition, enhance collaboration through IDP processes, and explore partnerships beyond municipal structures underscores the need for sustainable solutions. In navigating the nuances of both rural and urban settings, locally led approaches emerge as indispensable.

Further, the guideline sheds light on the critical role of WSCFs in co-management modalities, including municipal infrastructure, supported self-supply, and diverse water-related projects. It emphasizes that these modalities are not mutually exclusive, showcasing the versatility of WSCFs in addressing multifaceted community needs.

Finally, the observation that idle municipal infrastructure often lacks clear ownership underscores the importance of fostering a sense of responsibility and care within communities. In essence, the collaborative and community-driven approach aspired by the WSCFs, synthesized in this guideline, serves as a catalyst for meaningful contributions toward sustainable improvements in municipal water services or support by other agencies. The success lies not only in addressing current challenges but also in laying the foundation for resilient, locally led initiatives that stand the test of time.

