

Stakeholder Participatory Processes and Dialogue Platforms in the Mazowe River Catchment, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The introduction of water sector reforms in Zimbabwe was premised on the assumption that all stakeholders would be afforded a chance to fully contribute to the reform process. Neutral dialogue platforms were also expected to be put in place in order to afford various stakeholder groups the necessary space to engage with other stakeholders and have their voices heard. The Mazowe catchment was selected as a pilot project area in which integrated water resources management approaches and principles would be introduced and tested. Among other things, the approach emphasizes improved governance of the water sector through increased stakeholder participation and decentralization of water management responsibilities from central government to catchment-based organizational structures. Relying on evidence from the Mazowe catchment and detailed research carried out in the Nyadire and Nyagui sub-catchments, this paper analyzes the stakeholder participation processes initiated and dialogue platforms created to enhance stakeholder interaction. Results of the study show that the participatory strategies and processes implemented have been generally unsatisfactory and the dialogue platforms were weakened by failure of water user boards to function and effectively engage people at the grassroots level.

Key words: *stakeholder participation; governance; dialogue platforms; integrated water resources management; awareness*

Introduction

At the global level, issues of water scarcity and shifting natural resources management paradigms have helped to push water onto the priority list of international development agencies. In response to increasing water demand and changing global water resources management paradigms, Zimbabwe initiated a water sector reform programme in 1996. Among other things, the stated intentions of the reform were to improve governance of the water sector, bring about equitable access to water, and decentralize water resources management

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responsibilities from central government to catchment-based water management organizational structures. The Mazowe catchment was selected as a pilot catchment planning project area whose experiences would be used to inform the establishment of other catchment councils in the rest of the country. This paper is based on results from a study carried out to closely follow, analyze and document outcomes of the implementation of water sector reforms in the Mazowe catchment. Major focus is on the utility and effectiveness of stakeholder participatory processes utilized and dialogue platforms created for better stakeholder engagement in the catchment. The study sought to find out the extent of the stakeholders' participation in the water reform process as reflected through their perceptions and awareness of the water sector reforms. It also sought to find out what programmes and activities have been initiated during the reform process to ensure stakeholder participation and effective dialogue processes. The paper presents lessons of experience from the Mazowe catchment that can be used to inform water sector reforms in other developing countries.

Research Questions and Assumptions

One major assumption guides the analysis in this paper and that is, if properly crafted, dialogue platforms can create the appropriate conditions for better stakeholder engagement and decision-making that enables harmonization of different and conflicting interests in river basin management contexts. In other words, the greater the participation of stakeholders in the planning and implementation of catchment management strategies, the greater the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the institutions that emerge from water reform processes. Dialogue enables differences and potential conflicts to be better understood by various stakeholders who can then identify potential solutions together by consensus. Three key questions are useful in exploring this assumption. The first one is, which platforms can be best used or developed to implement river basin management initiatives while enabling more meaningful and smoother exchange of ideas, information and experiences among multiple stakeholder groupings? The second one is, what are the real and potential technical and methodological challenges to river basin dialogue processes and how can they be overcome? Thirdly, what sort of capacity building is required to create neutral spaces and facilitate dialogue among competing users and interests? Ultimately, appropriate and neutral dialogue platforms must be created if meaningful stakeholder engagement is to be realized.

Study Methodology

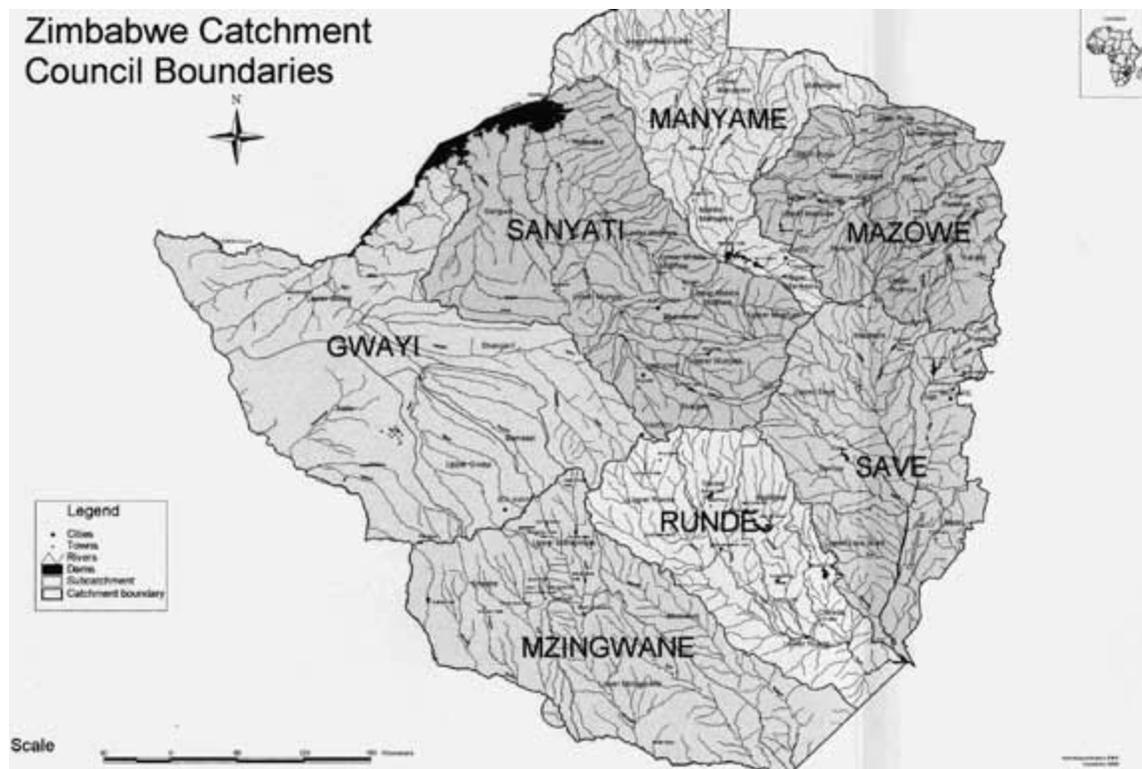
This study mainly utilized qualitative research methodologies to gather the required data or information, even though quantitative approaches were also utilized in cases where it was deemed more practical to do so. The research methodologies used reflect the importance of analyzing the appropriateness of both process and outcomes in public sector reforms. Qualitative perspectives tend to put a lot of emphasis on people's perceptions, meanings, attitudes, world-views and belief systems. Patton argues that these dimensions require description of what development outcomes actually mean to the respondents, rather than any scaling.¹ In addition, the same event or outcome may mean different things to different people.

In this paper, the analysis of stakeholder participation processes and dialogue platforms in the water sector reform programme relies, to a large extent, on narratives, perceptions and experiences of the people who have been involved in the programme in various ways. An interpretive approach is used to build up a relatively comprehensive narrative relating to the events taking place in the Mazowe catchment, why they happened, how they unfolded, why they unfolded the way they did and the outcomes of the process. A number of research methods were used in data gathering. The methods include review of relevant literature and documents; direct observation through attending catchment and sub-catchment council meetings and workshops; questionnaire-guided surveys; and key informant interviews. Using semi-structured open-ended questionnaires, surveys were carried out to establish the nature and extent of stakeholders' participation in the Mazowe catchment decision-making processes as the reforms were implemented.

A total of 119 household representatives were interviewed in the Musami communal areas (Nyagui sub-catchment) and 105 were interviewed in the Mutoko communal and resettlement areas (Nyadire sub-catchment). In Musami, the household surveys were carried out in the villages of Mushinga, Shangure, Mavhurume and Darare to reflect communal area stakeholder views. In Mutoko communal lands, household representatives were interviewed from two villages namely, Nyamuzizi and Kanyongo. More household representatives were drawn from villages 53, 68 and 74 in the Hoyuyu resettlement scheme to reflect resettlement area stakeholder views. Households included in the survey were selected through systematic random sampling procedures. This entailed the researcher approaching one household to carry out an interview with the household head and then skipping the next household in order to get a wider coverage of the village concerned. Preference for the interviews was given to household heads if they were available. In the event that the household head was not present, another adult family member would be interviewed.

The study sites

The Mazowe catchment lies in the north-eastern part of Zimbabwe and stretches across the border into Mozambique (see Map 1). According to Williams and Sithole, its total area is 38 900km² which is approximately ten percent of the total area of the country. The Mazowe river itself drains into the lower part of the Zambezi river in Mozambique downstream of the Cabora Bassa dam.² Throughout the catchment, one finds various types of property regimes including communal areas; big mines such as Bindura Nickel Corporation in Mashonaland Central and Acturus Mine in Mashonaland East, large estate concerns such as the former Anglo-American owned Mazowe Citrus Estate and huge timber and orchard industries in Manicaland. Communal areas make up a larger part of the catchment in all the three provinces. The catchment is made up of a total of ten sub-catchments namely Upper Ruya, Lower Ruya, Upper Mazowe, Middle Mazowe, Lower Mazowe, Nyadire, Nyagui, Upper Rwenya, Lower Rwenya and Kairezi. The study mainly focused on villages in the Nyagui and Nyadire sub-catchments for detailed study.



Source: Hydrology Department, Zimbabwe (2000)

The Nyagui Sub-catchment measures about 4 900km² covering parts of a number of districts that include Marondera, Goromonzi, Murewa, Shamva and Bindura. It has six water user boards namely, Chikwaka, Chinyika, Marondera, Mubvinzi, Nheweyembwa, and Musami. Data gathering was done in 4 villages lying in the Musami water user board. The Nyadire Sub-catchment measures about 5 431km² covering parts of several districts, which include Mutoko, Murewa, Mudzi, and Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe. It has eight water user boards, namely, Budga, Ngarwe, Mukarakate, Mutoko, Uzumba, Upper Nyamusanzara, Lower Nyamusanzara, and Maramba-Pfungwe. The study focused on 5 villages located in the Mutoko water user board.

Stakeholder Participation and Dialogue Platforms

Most water resources management theorists and practitioners are generally agreed that demand for fresh water is outstripping supply and that the traditional way of meeting new water needs through increasing water supply is no longer sustainable.³ A study by the IUCN in 1996 concluded that the population of the Southern African region is projected to double in less than 25 years from 145 million in 1995 and as such, water resources of the region are under siege. The demands being placed on these resources are growing daily, limiting the region's ability to provide its people with water.⁴ Traditional approaches for meeting increased demand for water relied almost exclusively on centralized infrastructure and decision-making: dams and reservoirs, pipelines and treatment plants, water departments and agencies.⁵ These old

notions of water resources management dominated by a supply-orientation and reliance on technical solutions to water problems have been discarded in favor of a governance regime that embraces user involvement in resource management. It is now generally acknowledged that water users and their representatives can make valuable contributions to water management decision-making processes.

Governance, stakeholder participation and integrated water resources management

The concept of 'governance' has implications for water resources allocation and management. Governance broadly refers to how power and decision-making is shared amongst different actors and groups in society. It is the sum of interactions between civil society and governments.⁶ It is thus a word which clearly has a relational dimension that focuses on how civil society and government interrelate, and how that relationship might change in ways that foster better power sharing. It also denotes the use of political authority to exercise control over society's resources. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) argues that governance has to do with mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.⁶ In this paper, institutions are defined as the formal and informal organizational arrangements, rules and regulations that influence water management practices in river basin contexts. This broad interpretation of governance can also be specifically applied to the water sector in that the emphasis on stakeholder participation and dialogue is, by implication, an emphasis on 'good governance'. Stakeholder participation enhances the potential for citizens and groups to articulate their interests and have their voices heard in river basin management decision-making processes.

The decentralization of water management responsibility to the catchment level is an attempt to implement a better water governance framework. The establishment of catchment councils, sub-catchment councils and water user boards is the operationalization of this framework. In this paper, 'decentralization' is defined as the deliberate and systematic shift of water management responsibilities from central government departments and ministries to local authorities at catchment, sub-catchment and water user board levels. It is becoming apparent that in the water sector reforms, decentralization, stakeholder participation and dialogue platforms have become both an end and a means to an end as they are expected to lead to increased stakeholder empowerment. But the model of decentralization promoted under the integrated water resources management (IWRM) framework is not a general type of decentralization. It is targeted at very specific functions of resource management and administration. While these functions are systematically shifted from central government to new management structures at the catchment level, central government departments and agencies retain a significant amount of overall authority and responsibility. They have the power to re-possess the authority transferred to the lower level management structures. They also define the rules and regulations that guide the operations of these structures. Therefore, the preferred mode of decentralization in the water sector tends to be de-concentration, a mode that does not offer many opportunities for genuinely empowering water users. De-concentrated

government officials continue to play a more significant role than locally elected representatives at the river basin level.

Dialogue as a viable option in river basin decision-making processes

As is the case in the management of most other common property resources, river basin management has become increasingly concerned with bringing in stakeholders to key decision-making processes. When individuals or groups of individuals share water resources as a common property, they are connected in a socio-political, economic and ecological sense. Misuse of the resource by one individual affects other users.⁷ It is this understanding of water that works as a catalyst for collective action among communities in water management. It has also led to the growth of the stakeholder-based basin management approaches (a new form of collective action). Thus, many development projects that affect river basins are now subject to more inclusive assessments and decision-making procedures than they were in the past. Opportunities for hitherto, marginalized voices (rural farmers and the poor) to make themselves heard have increased.⁸

Due to the ever-present potential for conflict and diverse views over resource sharing arrangements and practices, one of the cornerstones of stakeholder participation in a river basin context becomes dialogue. Dialogue basically refers to the process of interaction between different stakeholders with a view to addressing specific problems related to competing interests, conflicts, and views on how basin resources should be used or managed. Therefore, dialogue is an option that directly addresses the requirements for stakeholder participation and collective action in water resources management. What immediately becomes crucial is the identification of key stakeholders that would make the dialogue process viable, more meaningful, and effective. It is also important to find ways in which each stakeholder group can participate effectively.

Each river basin is usually constituted by a particular array and configuration of stakeholders whose social, economic and political position gives each of them a unique ability (or lack of) to have their voices heard in basin decision-making and negotiation processes. Due to different ecological, social, economic and political circumstances, stakeholder interactions differ from one basin to another. Wester and Warner argue that it the size of the population in most river basins precludes the direct participation of all stakeholders in basin level decision-making.⁹ Thus, questions that usually arise in relation to stakeholders in river basins include: Who should be seen as a legitimate stakeholder? Who should represent groups of stakeholders? Are all stakeholders equal in terms of rights to make decisions affecting the basin? Which stakeholder groups are likely to dominate the decision-making process? What forms of representation are appropriate for different stakeholder groups? Different stakeholder concerns and worldviews on development, participation, and river basins are shaped by where they come from, what scale they operate at, and how they perceive problems facing the resource. Stakeholder analysis is therefore, an essential component in the design of river basin management frameworks. It is also important to identify the stakeholders' diverse needs and interests and their relative power and influence, especially for low-visibility groups that are traditionally excluded from the public arena.

A few salient points cut across most accounts of dialogue processes. Allen provides a concise summary of these points. He states that dialogue leads to the development of shared understandings by the groups involved through negotiation. It leads to a convergence of interests, and learning about the stakes and mechanisms at work. It also leads to deliberate reflection about mutual interdependence among the conflicting parties.¹⁰ Dialogue is therefore a useful tool where a range of perspectives must be brought to bear on complex issues such as those posed by integrated catchment management, challenges that need to involve multiple stakeholders in making decisions which take account of social, ecological and economic considerations. As the decision-making environment becomes more contested, the need for effective dialogue increases.

Platforms and fora for stakeholder dialogue have to be identified (or created) if dialogue is to become a formal component of river basin management. In some cases, this might mean having recourse to institutional arrangements that formalize participation of stakeholders in key river basin management bodies. Stakeholder dialogue may also be more focused on specific decisions and projects, for example, through environmental impact assessment processes. At another level, stakeholder dialogue may focus on governance arrangements and broad principles. However, successful establishment of stakeholder opportunities and platforms for negotiation does not and cannot take place overnight. It is usually the outcome of years of negotiation and less inclusive decision-making, and the terms of involvement are continuously re-evaluated and re-negotiated.¹¹

Catchments, Sub-catchments and Water User Board Areas

A catchment refers to all the land drained by a single river and its tributaries. It is a hydrological zone or physical geographical area of land dominated by one big river into which several smaller rivers and streams flow. It is therefore, the area constituted by all the places from which rainfall run-off flows to the dominant river (river catchment area). The Mazowe River, for instance, forms a big catchment (about 39 000 km²) into which several tributaries such as the Nyadire river and the Nyagui river drain. The characteristics of any river (physical, chemical, biological etc.) are determined by the nature of the catchment and the activities, both anthropogenic and natural, that take place in it. A sub-catchment is a sub-section of the catchment defined by the catchment area of one of the rivers that flow into the major catchment river. The Nyadire river catchment area, for instance, forms a sub-catchment of the Mazowe catchment area. A water user board area is ordinarily a smaller geographical unit of the sub-catchment. Its boundaries are determined by the catchment area of a smaller river or stream that flows into the sub-catchment river. However, there are cases in the Mazowe catchment where water user board boundaries were not determined by hydrological units but by administrative demarcations (wards). The catchment council, sub-catchment council, and water user board committees provide the stakeholder dialogue platforms where water issues and conflicts are dealt with.

The Mazowe Catchment Experience

The water management regime established during colonialism in Zimbabwe systematically excluded the larger majority of people from the decision-making process through the requirement that one had to have a water right to qualify for membership of river boards. Decentralization of water management responsibility to new institutions at the catchment, sub-catchment, and water user board levels has been adopted as a way of correcting these historical inequities. In the long-run, these institutions are also expected to actively lead the information dissemination process. When the Mazowe catchment was chosen as one of the pilot catchment planning project areas, its express mandate was to interpret the principles of the integrated water resources management approach and convert them into specific action plans that would be tried and tested in the catchment before they were replicated elsewhere. IWRM stresses comprehensive river basin management, decentralized water management structures, stakeholder participation, and reliance on the market mechanism, pricing, and technology to promote water efficiency, recover costs, and conserve the resource. In the Mazowe catchment, participation of a wider spectrum of stakeholders in decisions regarding water allocation was expected to make the process more transparent and less conflict-ridden given that the catchment had many water right holders and competition for the available water was increasing rapidly.

By April 1997, the catchment could boast of at least some clearly defined institutional structure that was beginning to operate and spearhead the reforms. On 11 April 1997, the Mazowe pilot project was officially launched. Community-level elections for thirty-two water user boards were subsequently held during the following month. Each water user board nominated two members to represent their stakeholders at the sub-catchment level. Sub-catchment councils met for the first time in June 1997 and nominated two members each who would represent them at the catchment council level. The fully elected Mazowe catchment council officially met for the first time in July 1997 and was expected to meet once every month thereafter. At that time, most of the discussions held by the catchment council centered on how to assist the fledgling water user boards and sub-catchment councils within the original project area so that they could become fully functional.

Media and methods of stakeholder consultation used

Knowledge and information are cornerstones of any dialogue and public participation process. Knowledge and information empowers and capacitates participants in dialogue platforms. Well-informed stakeholders are better placed to make meaningful contributions to the dialogue process. The media and methods of communication or information dissemination used in any public participation programme determine the extent to which stakeholders gain knowledge and information. Therefore, information dissemination has a direct bearing on the effectiveness of the dialogue process. Results of observations and surveys carried out during this study to assess the effectiveness of the consultation process in water reforms are quite

revealing. The WRMS secretariat mainly disseminated information through meetings and workshops as well as through the electronic and print media. In the print media, pamphlets printed in English and translated to some of the major local languages such as Shona, Ndebele, and Tonga were produced. Posters in English, Shona and Ndebele were printed and distributed throughout the country. Adverts regarding the water reforms were also placed in all the major newspapers. The electronic media used radio, audio drama and television news items to publicize the reforms. Despite all these efforts, the process has generally been very slow in disseminating information to all people in most catchment areas and results from the data gathered in the Nyadire and Nyagui sub-catchments confirm this conclusion. More than 90% of respondents interviewed in these sub-catchments were completely unaware of the reforms and the new institutions formed.

In the whole of the Mazowe catchment, where distribution records of the information dissemination material were kept, a total of about 12,487 Shona pamphlets, 4,711 English pamphlets, and 2,426 posters were sent out for public consumption. These were sent out through the offices of the District Administrator, Provincial Administrator, the Governor, Agricultural Extension officers, the Natural Resources Board, Commercial Farmers Union, Zimbabwe Farmers Union, and traditional leadership structures. It is debatable and doubtful that this was an effective way of disseminating information because the information did not reach the grassroots level. Where the grassroots people got hold of the pamphlets, they either did not read them or read them without understanding the message conveyed altogether. Advertisements put in the print media are not necessarily effective because many people may not access them. Besides, advertisements do not give room for feedback from the target group such that WRMS could not have established whether or not they reached the intended targets with their communication strategy.

WRMS convened national and catchment-specific consultative workshops. All key stakeholder groups were invited to send representatives to these workshops. The researcher attended a number of the workshops in the Mazowe catchment and also had access to reports of workshops carried out in other catchments of the country. Most of the workshops were well attended and WRMS presented information on the reform process. Participants discussed the information and immediately gave some feedback regarding their views about the reforms. It was assumed that the representatives would then go back and disseminate the information among their constituencies at the grassroots level but there are indications to show that this did not happen. The surveys carried out by the researcher in the Nyagui and Nyadire sub-catchments indicated there were no systematic report-backs to the grassroots level. As a result, while sub-catchment council members and other stakeholder representatives have been exposed to the major water sector reform issues, their constituencies have, to a large extent, remained unaware of these issues.

The process of stakeholder consultation

In each of the workshops held at the national, catchment, and sub-catchment levels, key stakeholders were represented and specific aspects of the reforms were discussed and clarified. Active interaction took place between WRMS, the Department of Water Development (DWD)

and most of the stakeholders and a lot of feedback was provided to WRMS. Most of the people who attended these workshops demonstrated improved understanding of the reform process after the workshops. In 2001 and 2003 when key informant interviews were held with some of the catchment and sub-catchment council members who had attended the workshops, most of them could still remember the key issues discussed and relate them to the ongoing reforms. They generally demonstrated a clear understanding of the rationale for the reforms, key changes made to the water Act, and the role of ZINWA as a newly established institution.

There was not much difference in the level of awareness and understanding between different stakeholder groups. One major draw-back though is that the workshops limited discussions and increased awareness to only workshop participants and representatives from various stakeholder groups. There was no systematic transfer of the knowledge to the grassroots level. Interviews carried out with Rural District Council (RDC) officials indicated that only their representative who attended the workshops was fully informed. The rest of the officials would have only heard about the reforms without getting any detailed information. The same situation prevailed in the communal and resettlement areas where traditional leaders and RDC councilors were aware of the reforms while most of the ordinary people were not well informed.

The electronic media

As part of the awareness campaigns and information dissemination, WRMS ran a 10-minute long drama series in Ndebele and Shona on Radio 2. Advertisements were also shown on television by both WRMS and ZINWA. It is difficult to determine the overall effectiveness of these advertisements as no formal survey was carried out to assess stakeholder reception and understanding of the drama. However, it can be safely concluded that the advertisements could only reach those people with television sets who happened to be watching the television at the particular times when they were shown. In urban, mining and commercial farming areas, the television is effective in that it provides both visual and sound images during information dissemination. But for most people in rural and resettlement areas of Zimbabwe, the television is a luxury that they do not possess. Discussions held with stakeholders in communal and resettlement areas of the Nyagui and Nyadire sub-catchments revealed that the most effective way to disseminate information in these areas is to use existing communication channels and leadership structures. These include the local governance system, agricultural extension officers, religious leaders, schools and traditional leaders such as chiefs, kraal-heads or village chairpersons. These have closer and constant interaction with the people at the grassroots level. During the study, most of the people who were not aware of the ongoing water sector reforms tended to perceive the reforms as having little to do with their lives. They were therefore, indifferent to the whole process.

Stakeholder analysis

The study revealed that consultation of key stakeholders had not been properly targeted. For instance, it generally targeted all people in the communal and resettlement areas instead of

farmers. Some of the key community figures such as councilors, RDC officials and traditional leaders were invited to the catchment and sub-catchment councils but then these leaders tend to represent political or administrative platforms. If farmer groups had been targeted, they would represent the farming community and this is the group with water issues at heart because water makes a difference in farming. Awareness would have spread through and among people with a genuine interest in water resources management (farmer group networks). Information dissemination through farmer group networks could also have been enhanced by reliance on agricultural extension and Zimbabwe Farmers' Union officials. These agencies are directly involved and interested in water issues and they also have a direct link with the communities.

In addition, observations made by the researcher during workshops and meetings organized by WRMS in the Mazowe Catchment are that the process was not really consultative or participatory. WRMS officials tended to introduce pre-determined ideas, concepts and principles that they felt were good for the reform process and ask participants to debate on them and select those that should be included in the water policy and legislation. Therefore, what really transpired may be called 'guided stakeholder participation' and not genuine participation. Stakeholder participation requires that you identify the problems and solutions with the people involved as opposed to doing it for them.¹² In the case of the Mazowe catchment, consultation would have been more genuine if WRMS had facilitated problem identification with the people and then gotten a consensus regarding the way forward. In this process, use of participatory rural appraisal tools and techniques could have been more useful and effective in identifying water issues and challenges that are more relevant to the stakeholders as well as solutions that the stakeholders felt would be appropriate.

Information feedback processes

One intrinsic requirement of stakeholder participation is that consultation should result in two way communication where there is feedback that shows whether or not the message is reaching its intended target. Any concerns and issues that need clarification for the benefit of the intended audience can then be addressed immediately. This study found out that the feedback system in the Mazowe catchment was relatively good particularly with reference to outputs from meetings and workshops. Minutes of the catchment and sub-catchment council meetings were regularly forwarded to the Ministry of Water and WRMS for their records and comments where necessary. In this way, some of the stakeholder concerns were forwarded to the relevant authorities and the Ministry's responses to these concerns were then send back to the catchment and sub-catchment councils through report backs by WRMS officials at the next meeting. There are instances where Ministry officials were invited to attend the catchment and sub-catchment council meetings so that they could address and clarify certain concerns raised in previous meetings.

However, during the drafting of the new Water Act and ZINWA Act, stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with the way the process was handled by the Ministry of Water and WRMS. They ended up feeling that the new legislation was becoming the product of ministerial dictates. On several occasions, stakeholders complained that their participation in drafting the Act was not adequate. At a meeting of the Mazowe catchment council held on 17 October 1997,

when the eighth draft of the water Bill was distributed among the catchment council members, most of them stated that they had never been given the earlier drafts. In 1998, a year later, when the draft water Bill was already being discussed in Parliament, people from the Nyagui and Nyadire sub-catchment councils were requesting to be educated about the contents of the Bill. Again, they complained that they were being sidelined from a very important part of the reform process. Eventually, in 2001 (four years later) workshops were organized for sub-catchment councils in the Mazowe catchment to be informed on what the Water Act contained. Thus, communication and feedback in relation to the drafting of the new water legislation and some of the statutory instruments was neither smooth nor satisfactory. Essentially, the new legislation was drafted by people in DWD and WRMS without the full contribution of sub-catchment councils. Had that not been the case, then they would have been familiar with its provisions earlier than was the case. In this respect, stakeholder participation was only rhetorical and superficial. It neither began at the grassroots level nor sufficiently filtered down to the grassroots.

Gender dimensions of participation

The term gender is often used with reference to the social and economic power relations between men and women. In analyzing access to water, gender and power configurations emerge as important themes. Nemarundwe states that gender relations are socially constructed through meanings and practices, which invest them with particular significance in everyday social interaction. Feminist and political ecology approaches stress that gender differentiation can be traced to a societal division of labor, property rights and power. Participation of women in management structures is considered vital in ensuring that women have a voice in the management of natural resources.¹³ The role that women play in the management of water resources within and outside the household is critical to rural economies. Their participation in the stakeholder consultation process is therefore, as vital as their participation in the water management structures and dialogue platforms created.

There is no evidence to show that the dialogue platforms established in the Mazowe catchment were sensitive to women's participation and the women were generally excluded from the decision-making processes. A gender sensitive consultation process does not only imply participation. It is a process informed by the belief that the problematic category in women development is not the women, but the socially constructed relationship between men and women in which women occupy a subordinate position. The domination of men in decision-making processes for the Mazowe catchment was very apparent. During this study, it was established that all the members of the Nyagui and the Nyadire sub-catchment councils were men. These sub-catchment councils did not have a single woman out of an average of twenty members per sub-catchment council.

The Mazowe Catchment council itself initially had three women out of a total of fifteen members. By 2004, only one woman was regularly attending meetings of the Mazowe catchment council as a member. The other two women were no longer attending. Had the participatory process been more gender-sensitive, it would have created more space for women to assume positions on the catchment and sub-catchment councils. In this way, the women

could have been able to identify their interests, become more informed and aware of the reform process, gain confidence and have their voices heard in the reform process. Perhaps a quota system would have ensured that more women participated. During the socio-economic survey, most of the respondents indicated that they would prefer women to represent them in discussions about water issues. Sixty five percent of the respondents said that women are most suitable to represent the community on water issues. More than sixty percent of the respondents said that women should be responsible for managing water in the community. But while people acknowledge the important role that women play or can play in water resources management, this is not reflected in the water reform program as evidenced by the conspicuous absence of women from the new water management structures.

Awareness of the new institutions in the Nyagui and Nyadire sub-catchments

Asked to demonstrate their knowledge of the new institutions for water management, most of the people revealed that they were not familiar with these institutions. Tables 1 and 2 show the results obtained from the survey carried out on knowledge of the new water management institutions in the two sub-catchments.

Table 1. Knowledge of new water management institutions in the Nyagui sub-catchment

Institution	% knowing the institution	% not knowing the institution
Catchment council	4	96
Sub-catchment council	7	93
Water user board	21	79
ZINWA	4	96
Water development association	7	93
Chairman of water user board	15	85

N = 119

Table 2. Knowledge of new water management institutions in the Nyadire sub-catchment

Institution	% knowing the institution	% not knowing the institution
Catchment council	5	95
Sub-catchment council	6	94
Water user board	19	81
ZINWA	6	94
Water development association	10	90

Chairman of water user board	9	91
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N = 105

The tables show that most of the respondents in the Nyagui and Nyadire sub-catchments respectively, were not aware of the new institutions formed to lead management of water resources in the catchment. Only six percent of the respondents said that they had ever met a member of their local water user board. The majority of the respondents (92%) said they were not even aware that there is a new water Act for the country. Only eight of the respondents said that they had knowledge of the new water Act. Most of those who were informed about the new water Act said that it had been explained to them at a meeting called for by traditional leaders to discuss other issues not necessarily specific to water. The water user board member in the area had taken advantage of this forum to explain about the water reforms. These percentages reveal a general lack of knowledge regarding the new water management institutions. If the people had been actively participating in the reform process right from the beginning, they would most likely have been much more informed about these institutions than they indicated during the survey.

The water user board problem

Analysis of the new water legislation revealed that the water user board (which is the lowest management unit) is not legally recognized. The new Water Act only provides for the establishment of catchment and sub-catchment councils. One of the negative impacts of this has been that financial support from government and donors has been limited to the catchment and sub-catchment councils. Yet the water user boards also require this kind of support in order to function smoothly. These water user boards were designed to be the vital link between the grassroots and the sub-catchment council in terms of information dissemination. The study revealed that water user board committees sometimes go for long stretches of time without being active or functional. This implies that the link between the higher water management structures and the grassroots level has been broken, thereby neutralizing one of the important dialogue platforms.

Discussion

The study established that there were some instances in which catchment and sub-catchment councils were forced to rubber-stamp decisions made at higher levels. A good example is the draft Water Bill that the Mazowe catchment council felt had been drafted without their contribution. At the end of the day, the Ministry of Water claims that the new legislation was drafted with full contributions from stakeholder representatives when in actual fact the consultation was artificial. Genuine consultation helps to ensure that all relevant views are taken on board and makes implementation easier. The participatory processes utilized have been neither adequate nor effective enough to make a significant difference at the local level. More resources should have been allocated to publicity and community mobilization work. One

useful option would have been to employ full-time community mobilization officers who could raise awareness of the reforms among the communities in such a way that the communities become informed citizens who can meaningfully contribute to decision-making in the catchment. Alternatively, the reform could have made use of agricultural extension officers who are already on the ground and are much more in touch with the people. As the assessment of stakeholder participation has shown, awareness of the reform process has remained acutely low at the grassroots levels.

Participatory processes should begin with the grassroots and maintain the momentum gathered. The new water management structures in the Mazowe catchment were formed in top-down fashion and hence, they lack the appropriate grounding at local levels. In addition, existing institutions - traditional, governmental, and non-governmental organizations - were not formally involved in the reform process. Thus, the reform process failed to take advantage of the opportunities that these institutions offer in terms of information dissemination. They must be brought on board for the reforms to be holistic and easier to implement. There is also an urgent need for more awareness campaigns to be carried out at the grassroots level in order for the reform message to spread widely.

Lack of legal recognition for the water user boards significantly diminished the opportunities for linking the grassroots to the formal dialogue platforms created during the reform process. Without the necessary support from the government and donors, most of the water user boards failed to function with the result that information and education about the reforms has not reached the grassroots levels. Only members of the catchment and sub-catchment councils have some information about the reforms yet it is the people at the grassroots level who are expected to be actively involved in managing the resource on a daily basis. Unless the issue of providing operational support to the water user boards is resolved, awareness will remain low and the reform process might not get the cooperation of the people on the ground. The utility of smaller units of management as effective dialogue platforms is lost.

The new institutions were structured to embrace all interest groups. While this ensures that everyone's voice is given a chance to be heard, it has the disadvantage of making the institutions unstable and decision-making more difficult. The spirit of 'community' remains superficial. The interests of different groups, such as commercial farmers, urban councils, resettlement and communal area people, small-scale commercial farmers and miners, for instance, are quite varied. But with the spirit of 'stakeholder participation' in mind, these groups were brought together to form the catchment councils, sub-catchment councils and water user boards. A systematic stakeholder analysis process would have revealed that commercial farmers have been using water for agricultural purposes for a long time dating back to colonial times. They are more familiar with modern water management principles than their counterparts from other sectors. On the other hand, most of the communal and resettlement area people have not had a chance to use water on a large-scale commercial basis. Their usual concerns lie in water for domestic purposes and livestock. All the other groups also have their own unique concerns. This makes it very difficult for the new institutions, made up of all these disparate interest groups, to make timely decisions. It might be better to split the institutions

along user group lines and then form an association of these groups where different interests would then be represented in a more informed manner.

Stakeholder participation is a key aspect of water resources management discourses and finding the appropriate institutional mix for effective implementation of the water reforms remains vital. While there are serious stakeholder participation shortcomings in the Mazowe catchment planning process, it is also true that the foundation for further development has already been laid. Through careful orchestration and learning from experiences in the Mazowe and other catchments, it is not too late to improve the stakeholder participation processes in water reform and ensure that some of the basic tenets of good governance are taken on board. The catchment councils, sub-catchment councils, and water user boards are important platforms for dialogue, conflict resolution and information dissemination. What is required is to provide these new institutions with the necessary technical and financial support so that they can carry out their mandate more effectively.

Conclusion

This paper raises a number of critical issues in stakeholder participation and river basin dialogue processes that need to be continuously teased out and regularly re-visited as water reform programmes are implemented. There is need to think carefully about the kind of dialogue platforms created to facilitate decision-making in river basin management. The platforms created should enable free and faster flow of information among various stakeholders and at different water management scales. This also requires effective coordination between the different management scales, for instance between the sub-catchment and the water user board and down to the grassroots level. Different social groups will have differing capacities to meaningfully participate and therefore the need for systematic gender-oriented stakeholder analysis becomes critical. This analysis enables river basin authorities to understand and take into account the needs and capacities of various social groups. These groups include women, men, and the poor whose voices may not be easily heard in the river basin dialogue processes. Gender-oriented stakeholder analysis partly provides responsible government agencies with a mechanism for ensuring that constraints to meaningful participation are identified and addressed in order to create more neutral and equitable platforms for dialogue.

Notes

1. Patton 1987.
2. Williams and Sithole 2001.
3. IUCN, 1996.
4. Gleick, 2002.
5. Manor, 1999.
6. UNDP 1997.
7. Global Water Partnership, 2003.
8. Australian Mekong Resource Centre 2003.

9. Wester and Warner 2002.
10. Allen, 2004.
11. Wester, et.al., 2003.
12. Cernea, 1985; Chambers, 1983.
13. Nemarundwe, 2003.

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