

CREATING AN AWARENESS OF GROUNDWATER



PICTURE ABOVE: Drilling a water supply borehole in Ghana

The process of developing a new National Groundwater Strategy was set out in the first NGS newsletter (October 2009). A leading premise was that "Groundwater does not play a big enough role as a water resource in South Africa". The newsletter outlined the key issues raised by stakeholders, along with desired approaches to management. This edition focuses on marketing and communication in creating a positive awareness of groundwater.

The following vision and mission statements were collated from stakeholder inputs:

VISION

That groundwater is recognised, utilized and protected as an integral part of South Africa's water resource.

MISSION

It is our mission to see that groundwater fulfils its role in bringing life, health, growth, and development to the people of this country as an integral part of the water resource and without detriment to the environment. We see groundwater as a respected and protected resource, supplying domestic agricultural, and mining requirements as a clean, reliable, and cost effective source of water, particularly in areas of surface water scarcity. In achieving our vision we see all groundwater use controlled, monitored and very strictly managed, guaranteeing sustainability and protecting against negative impacts and unintended consequences.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

Attitudes towards groundwater must change fundamentally. The groundwater strategy must communicate the importance, status and legal standing of groundwater, raising its profile and changing mindsets by actively addressing the negative perceptions that are often associated with groundwater.

Change in attitude can only happen if both key decision-makers and the wider public become aware of the role and importance of groundwater. Confidence in groundwater will only be enhanced through management, with delivery matching or surpassing surface water.

Key communication messages

- A significant amount of groundwater is available. Currently only 20% of the available resource is being utilized. Development will require investment.
- Groundwater is often a good source for rural water supply. It also has an important role in urban supply. Groundwater may be used as a sole source, or conjunctively with surface water.
- Conjunctive ground- and surface water use adds to water security.
- Groundwater systems in South Africa are not unique. Much can be learned from the positive experience and successful use of groundwater in other countries.
- Groundwater has important environmental functions (supplying baseflow, springs, wetlands, and sometimes deep-rooted vegetation)
- Groundwater is a safe and reliable source, but should be tested and treated with the same diligence accorded to surface water.
- Groundwater must be protected from over-abstraction and from pollution.
- The groundwater resource must be monitored, and use managed. High management standards are critical to reliability and confidence.
- Groundwater management is a highly rewarding career

Draft Policy Briefs

Two policy briefs have been prepared as communication tools in addressing the so-often negative perceptions of groundwater in South Africa.

- "Setting the Record Straight" looks at the historical neglect of groundwater due to its past status as private water. Poor management and over-abstraction have left the bitter taste of unreliability. The belief that South African geology and climate have resulted in a unique groundwater system has constrained learning from international experience.
- In the "Promise of Groundwater" international reliance and use of groundwater are highlighted alongside the advantages of having a ready supply of water locally (underground) and relatively resilient to drought cycles, and the enormous potential there is for further use.

TO COMMENT

This newsletter is produced under the direction of the Department of Water Affairs (Mr Fanus Fourie, Water Resource Planning Systems)

Comment and correspondence related to all newsletters should be addressed to Dirk Versfeld at email: dirki@iafrica.com.
Tel 021 4241787
Cell 082 3774084

WEB ADDRESSES

<http://www.dwa.gov.za/groundwater/documents.asp>
<http://www.artificialrecharge.co.za>



DID YOU KNOW?

50% of the world's drinking water is supplied from groundwater sources. Groundwater is often safe to drink directly, and usually requires far less treatment than surface water. This is particularly useful to small towns and villages where water treatment facilities may be limited or over-burdened.