SPLASH

Learning from our activities

Capacity Development Support to the African Groundwater Network (AGW-Net)

Introduction

Groundwater is a critical resource in Africa, considered to be the only realistic supply option for many dispersed rural communities and a supplement to meet the demands of growing urban centres. However, a historical lack of knowledge and skills in sustainable groundwater management has resulted in its neglect and mismanagement. AGW-Net was established in 2008 to counter these problems through: increasing awareness and political commitment to groundwater management, fostering support to the African Groundwater Commission (AGWC) established under the umbrella of the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW); and the development of appropriate groundwater management capacity at all levels. It was agreed that SPLASH would support AGW-Net capacity development initiatives. Two courses were held in Johannesburg during 2009, and in Lomé in 2010, targeted to post degree level, non hydro geologist African water managers. SPLASH partners BGR, GEUS and SDC have worked in partnership with AGW-Net, Cap-Net and the corresponding host institutions – the University of Witwatersrand and the Global Water Partnership of West Africa.

Rationale

A key SPLASH objective is to speed up the processes by which research results are used by practitioners and policy makers. SPLASH findings related to good research management practice showed that research rarely reflects the articulated demands of practitioners and policy makers, also that research results are rarely disseminated in formats which may be readily understood and used. The preparation and delivery of training materials to incorporate and disseminate research knowledge was therefore considered to be a good 'fit' with SPLASH activities, whilst also corresponding to the aims and objectives of working partners. Furthermore, the anticipated interaction between researchers, practitioners and policy makers would help foster demand driven future research needs, and support development of collaborative working relationships and partnerships to address these needs. Training course content also corresponded well to thematic priorities identified through SPLASH consultations.

Resources

Each course has been delivered within an overall budget of around €50,000, of which SPLASH has contributed approximately half of the resources in the form of partner funding, and technical and administrative support. Remaining resources were contributed by the University of Witwatersrand and Cap-Net.

A total of 30 participants from 18 African countries participated in the training. The first course was conducted in English; the second attracted a more francophone participation and included simultaneous French/English translation.

What have we learnt?

Working in a collaborative partnership with existing institutions and initiatives has contributed to longer term institutional sustainability, leveraged the strengths of each partner, and as a result maximised the impact of the joint activities. For example, conducting the training courses has raised the profile of groundwater on the political agenda,

through active participation of policy makers on training courses and at opening ceremonies; the cooperation with representatives of the AGWC; and submission of reports and statements to AMCOW. This is due in part to the nature and influence of the partnership involved in these activities.

Feedback from the first course has informed the design of the second. Participants of the first course were predominantly civil engineers and hydrologists from water ministries and water bureaus. Participation on the second course reflected a broader section of society, which corresponds more closely to the broad range of stakeholders involved in both the use and management of groundwater resources.

Implementation of a series of activities over a longer term can achieve lasting impacts and economies of scale. The second training course benefited from 'training the trainer' effects which demonstrates greater local ownership and reduces external dependence.

Evaluation by course participants has been very positive. The involvement of researchers in its design and delivery, but also as participants of these training courses has proved to be an effective means of disseminating up to date knowledge on groundwater.

The state of existing knowledge amongst participants on groundwater system characteristics was weak prior to undertaking the training. The course content and delivery was extremely relevant to participants, incorporating current topical issues such as the impacts of climate change on groundwater. The training courses facilitated discussions of current challenges to groundwater management, and the development of suggested solutions between appropriate stakeholders.

Results

Follow up with participants from the first course was sought a year after the end of the course. Half of them responded. Participants reported back that they are using knowledge and skills developed during the course in their daily work, for example, when assessing and making decisions on water sources for proposed new water projects. In addition, participants are able to influence policy development to incorporate groundwater protection; this is happening at national level in two countries. Feedback also shows that course materials and knowledge have been shared more widely within and beyond the institutions of the participants.

Recommendations for the future

The institutional mandates of key organisations should recognise the importance of groundwater. For example, sustainable groundwater management should, but typically does not currently fall within the mandate of River Basin Organisations. Furthermore, research institutes and laboratories can play important supporting roles in groundwater management.

Participants suggested that establishing an online discussion forum could facilitate the development of longer term relationships and provide a cost effective means of sharing updated information and findings in the future.

Concerted knowledge management can support the longer term sustainability of courses, for example, through inclusion of course materials in appropriate locally based university curricula.

Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH learning notes available on the SPLASH website **www.splash-era.net**
If you would like to receive the quarterly SPLASH newsletter 'Making a SPLASH' please go to **www.splash-era.net/enquiries**

Partners: ADA, BGR, CMCC, DGDC, DIE, DWF, IMET, IRD, MAEE, MZP, NERC, NVE, SDC, SYKE and ULB **Co-ordinator:** DFID

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