

Assessing Public Participation in Water Conservation and Water Demand Management in Water Stressed Urban Areas: Insights from the City of Gweru, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Third world municipalities are saddled by a plethora of challenges in service delivery.

They also simultaneously have limited capacities at their disposal to solve the problems. However, public participation can reasonably enhance service delivery through conservation of the available limited resources. The paper investigates the level of water user participation in water conservation in the city of Gweru. Data was collected from water users and key informants selected from the local authority and citizen representative groups. A survey of 489 households was carried out in the city. Several water conservation and demand management measures were identified. However, the majority of respondents (98%) was never consulted by the local authority and did not participate in water decisions. Only a few respondents (2% participated in water conservation and demand management consultation meetings. This indicates that decision-making was a sole prerogative of the local authority. Conservation awareness across residential suburbs was incredibly low despite high literacy levels among the residents recorded in the city. Respondents reported significantly low participation ($p = 0.078$) in water conservation trainings which may have translated into limited conservation literacy. The findings also revealed poor communication channels between the local authority and residents such that water users felt disrespected and disregarded. Unfortunately no initiatives were in place to encourage and enable water user participation in water management. Lack of water user participation will perpetuate water conservation and demand management problems in the city of Gweru. It is therefore recommended that active participation channels be opened for sustainable water utilization and service delivery to be realized in Gweru.