



Introduction to Groundwater Governance

What is “Environmental Governance”?

According to professors at [Stanford University](#), “environmental governance” involves much more than the work of governments:

“Environmental governance relates to decision-makers at all levels; government managers and ministers, businesspeople, property owners, farmers, and consumers. In short, it deals with who is responsible, how they wield their power, and how they are held accountable for the impacts of their actions on other people and on natural resources.”

Environmental Governance is the means by which society determines and acts on goals and priorities related to the management of natural resources. This includes the rules, both formal and informal, that govern human behaviour in decision-making processes. as well as the decisions themselves.

What is “Water Governance”?

Water governance is a specific sub-set of environmental governance, refers to the political, social, economic and administrative systems that influence the use and management of water. Essentially, who gets what water, when and how, and who has the right to water and related services, and their benefits. It determines the equity and efficiency in water resource and services allocation and distribution, and balances water use between socio-economic activities and ecosystems that supports the human use of natural resources.

Water governance includes the formulation, establishment and implementation of water-related policies, legislation and institutions, and clarification of the roles and responsibilities of government, civil society and the private sector in relation water resources and services. The outcomes depend on how the stakeholders act in relation to the rules and roles that have been taken or assigned to them, AND on how those rules are applied and implemented by those responsible for enforcing them.

Types of Governance

According to the IUCN, appropriate, science-based legal frameworks on the global, regional, national, and local levels are a prerequisite for good environmental governance. Good governance is therefore founded in scientific principles, and results from decisions made based on sound and verifiable data and information, by informed role-players.

South Africa, a water scarce country, has a law and policy framework for water which is regarded as among the most progressive worldwide. Our water-related law is based upon the constitutional recognition of the right of access to water and the right to an environment that is not harmful to health and well-being, and ensures prevention of pollution and sustainable use of natural resources. Statutes such as the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), the National Water Act (NWA), the Water Services Act (WSA), the NEM: Waste Act, the NEM: Integrated Coastal Management Act (ICMA), and the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA), all have a bearing on how we practice groundwater governance. But the law does not always follow scientific principles, and groundwater practitioners need to influence the law.

This Introduction to Groundwater Governance is presented by **Carin Bosman**, WISA Senior Fellow, carin@cbss.co.za, www.cbss.co.za.