

Review of Adopt-a-River programme

A recently completed Water Research Commission (WRC) project has reviewed the efficacy of the government's Adopt-a-River programme. A new implementation model has been developed to propel the programme forward with enhanced participation of voluntary citizen science groups.

Background

The Adopt-A-River programme was initiated by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) in 2008. Initially it was launched as a volunteer programme aimed at community groups, pensioners, school learners, water user associations, and municipalities, among others.



The original Adopt-a-River programme was launched in 2008.

Apart from improving the water quality and general state of the country's rivers, the programme was thought to have additional benefits, such as instilling the concept of integrated water resource management among the general public.

In 2010, the programme was relaunched as one of the department's flagship programmes for job creation. This shifted the target group to unemployed women, youth and people living with disabilities. Once this change was made, the programme moved from one driven by volunteerism towards one driven by monetary incentive.

This shift also changed the outcome of the programme from one focusing on water resource quality monitoring to a focus on job creation.

As a result of a breakdown in the implementation phases of the programme, mainly due to a lack of financial incentives, DWS decided to review the Adopt-a-River programme in 2014.

This resulted in the WRC-led study aimed at reviewing and refocusing the Adopt-a-River Programme. This included redefining the key objectives and strategy of the programme towards improving the sustainability of the concept.

Review approach

A detailed background, looking at the Adopt-a-River programme's achievements and challenges was prepared and formed the basis of stakeholder interactions. A vision and mission statement were developed for the revised programme in addition to a clarification and refinement of the scope and focus.

The need for a new programme was discussed as well as the broad overall goals of the programme. The institutional and governance framework for the programme was completely redesigned.

The new framework is more holistic – including more sectors of society, as well as business. The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders were also reviewed.

Furthermore, the framework was redesigned to have an innovative two-pronged approach (a government prong and a public-private partnership prong). This approach was intended to limit risk (i.e. by having more than one implementing agency and organisation control the programme) and provide opportunities for more sectors of society to take part in the programme.

This also allows for broader collaboration between government departments, particularly DWS and the Department of Environmental Affairs, and other programmes such as Working for Water.

A new funding framework was developed. This framework allows for multiple sources of funding to be used to carry the programme and better allow for long-term sustainability. Lastly, a strong emphasis was placed on effective communication, capacity building and the role of citizen scientists.

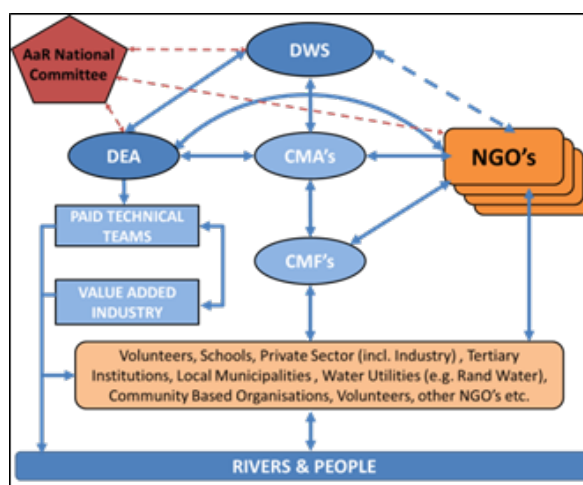
Key findings

The outcomes of the review and redesign of the Adopt-a-River programme can be summarised as follows:

- A detailed background report of the programme, including challenges and achievements was produced. This review document was used to guide the stakeholder discussions.
- New vision and mission statements were developed in addition to a new set of objectives.
- The institutional and governance framework for the programme was redesigned based on a review of the greatest challenges experienced between 2009 and 2015. The new framework is more holistic – it includes clearly-defined roles and responsibilities for each stakeholders.
- The review allowed for the development of an alternative funding framework as well as business cases for sustainable funding.
- A new communication framework was developed.
- Where the original programme design had limited means of assessing the success of the programme, provision has been made in the revised programme to use several indicators to measure success (both biophysical and social) which will form a critical component of the reporting of the programme.
- Strong focus has been placed on training and capacity building with the provision of more opportunities for career pathing and a focus on the development of

additional life skills on safety. The involvement of schools will be the primary focus of the revised programme.

- A direct link with the role of citizen scientists is made in the revised programme. Case studies were used to demonstrate where volunteer and private-public partnerships have been shown to be highly successful in adopting and caring for rivers.
- Lastly, issues around logistics and implementation are discussed with suggestions for improved efficiency.



The revised institutional and governance framework of the new-look Adopt-a-River programme.

Conclusions and recommendations

The original model was primarily a top-down approach where the majority of implementation efforts were dictated by the DWS national and regional coordinators. During implementation local leaders and volunteers were largely disregarded.

In contrast, the revised model incorporates the involvement of volunteers (in line with the original mandate and intended objectives of the programme) and also incorporates the involvement of incentivised participants.

This model addresses the need for job creation opportunities in the country and fosters integration/collaboration between government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Furthermore, the revised model allows for a bottom-up approach, recognising the impact and important role that volunteer groups (citizen scientists) on the ground provide to coordination efforts.

This approach allows for a constructive feedback loop, where

on-the-ground volunteers can provide useful information to local and regional authorities as well as the implementing agencies (e.g. NGOs, Catchment Management Agencies and Catchment Management Fora). It is strongly recommended that a policy decision is made by the custodian of Adopt-a-River taking the advantage of the remaining momentum sustained by citizen scientists and decide on the best option to follow in re-launching the programme.

Further reading:

To order the reports, *A revised Adopt-a-River Programme: Stakeholder input on the institutional and financial frameworks with a focus on an implementation strategy* (**Report No. KV 354/16**), contact Publications at Tel: (012) 330-0340, Email: orders@wrc.org.za or Visit: www.wrc.org.za to download a free copy.