



Minister Lindiwe Hendricks at the launch of the new book on water governance.

# New Book Pushes Good Water Governance

***A new handbook on good water governance has officially been launched by Minister of Water Affairs & Forestry Lindiwe Hendricks. The book, *Governance as a Triologue: Government-Society-Science in Transition*, was compiled by researchers from CSIR and published by Springer-Verlag and IWM.***

explained Hendricks. "The over-riding goals of our policy became integrated water resource management and the establishment of equity in resource distribution, and efficiency and sustainability in water use."

Following a dramatic change in their political environment, South Africans now have a constitutional right to water. "South Africans are fortunate in that the central concepts of social equity and the right to a healthy environment are entrenched in the country's constitution," noted Dr Anthony Turton co-author and water resource governance systems research leader.

Launched on World Water Day (22 March), the book shares how trends leading to a worsening global water crisis can be reversed through good water governance – one of the main contributors to water delivery failures. Using case studies from South Africa, North America, and global institutions, it shows how legal, social, institutional and political viewpoints are reflected in how we govern.

According to Hendricks, the consequence of good water governance, or lack thereof, can clearly be seen throughout South Africa's history. "The historical allocation of water resources in South Africa led to huge

inequality between people of different racial groups. The 1996 census, for example, found that 97% of white-headed households had water piped to their houses, compared to 26,7% of black households. Thus the necessity for South Africa to overhaul its governance structures and water allocations was clear."

Part of the inequality in allocations was related to the way in which the apartheid State allocated water rights; the spatial development of cities; and the institutional arrangements governing water allocation and distribution. Consequently, one of the drivers of the country's transformation was the need to transform institutions,

## IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION

He added, however, that the country still had a long way to go. "Despite the highly desirable attributes of landmark pieces of legislation, including the National Water Act and the Environmental Management Act, both of which are based on principles of sustainable development – authorities are still struggling to implement the requirements of these acts."

Investigation into possible reasons for non-implementation of legislation and government tools revealed a gap in the understanding of governance as a

concept. According to this research, governance has still not been fully explored and defined.

In an attempt to rectify this situation, CSIR organised an international symposium on ecosystem governance in 2005 with the aim of engaging specialists from various disciplines in exchanging ideas on unpacking the 'black box' of governance. There, delegates shared knowledge and exchanged ideas on specific elements of the proposed governance trialogue model, which comprises processes relating to science, government and society.

CSIR researcher Hanlie Hattingh explained that water governance requires effective interfaces between three processes, namely an interface between society and science, between government and society, and between government and science. "These interfaces have to be appropriately balanced and available in the right format, at the right time, to ensure good governance."

Turton and Hattingh were joined by CSIR researchers Dr Marius Claassen, Gillian Maree, Dr Dirk Roux, and Wilma Strydom in editing the book. Prof Asit Biswas, the current Stockholm Water Prize Laureate, who is also Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Water Resource Development, along with the Editor-in-Chief of Water Policy, Dr Jerome

Delli Priscoli, are credited for having had a profound influence on the book.

It is reported that the symposium assisted in



Good governance is essential to sustainable water supply.

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developing a deeper understanding of the variables, enabling a better understanding of what was needed to promote good governance. The discussions formed the basis of the *Governance* book.

**NEW DEFINITION OF GOVERNANCE**

The book is divided into three sections, each detailed in certain aspects of governance. The first section provides an overview of governance and, importantly, how governance is linked to social and ecological sustainability. In turn, the second section interrogates the applicability and validity of the Trialogue model to real-world ecosystem problems. Cross-cutting issues of science communication, knowledge management, learning and issues of power are dealt with in the final part of the book.

The book concludes with a new definition of water governance, namely

that water governance is the process of informed decision-making that enables trade-offs between competing users of a given resource so as to balance protection with beneficial use in such a way as to mitigate conflict, enhance equity, ensure sustainability and hold officials accountable.

“This definition recognises the importance of how decisions are made and who makes these decisions so that we are able to use our natural resources to address the pressing needs of our society, while at the same time balancing these demands with the need to protect our resources as the heritage of future generations,” reported Hendricks. “A major challenge is doing this in an equitable and sustainable manner for continued growth and transformation in South Africa and internationally.”

In providing a way forward to good water governance, the book suggests a number of approaches. These include comparative analyses of different countries, institutional contexts and institutional reactions that provide valuable insights into related problems that exist in diverse societies. “We need, therefore, to look closely at institutional interactions, at organisational cultures and at the transformation into knowledge,” noted Turton. “We need to study in more detail the move from government to governance.” 

