

## Public Participation in Water Conservation

Public participation is a challenge that can help align the economic, social and environmental needs of the country. It bridges the gap between the governed and those who govern. Its aim is to make governments actions more transparent to avoid corrupt or antisocial behaviour. It is important to mention Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This was a United Nations conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Principle 10 states the following: "Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At a national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided."

We therefore need the participation of the public in order for our project to be a success. Levathi news is here to make you aware of the project we are involved in. The project forms part of the Emfuleni Water Loss Reduction Project, aimed at educating the community on the best water saving practices. The Water services assessors form the link between the community and the authorities. They are encouraging the community to take ownership of their own infrastructure. By reporting all problems, the municipality will be dedicated to improving service delivery.

An issue we would like to address, is that of sanitation practices. Poor sanitation in schools can impair the growth and development of our children. School attendance becomes limited and it can also affect the ability to concentrate and learn. Poor sanitation also has a major impact on the economy, as it affects the health of the employees and the health of the environment. Employees missing work, due to sanitation-related illnesses, affects economic development. Another concern is the increased pollution of rivers and shorelines, which negatively affects tourism in those areas. Tourism in our country is a huge industry, injecting substantial amounts of money into our economy. If tourism slows down, growth is negatively affected.

So what do we do about these problems? The answer is not to simply provide access to improved water and sanitation. Just because the facilities are available does not mean that they are being used correctly. This is where the public participation and social awareness come in. We need to start educating the communities on how to use water and integrate positive practices from childhood upwards. The project includes workshops at local clinics, door-to-door education and awareness in the local schools. We are asking you to take the time to listen and to learn for your sake, your children's sake and for a cleaner, healthier future.

Cara Willoughby