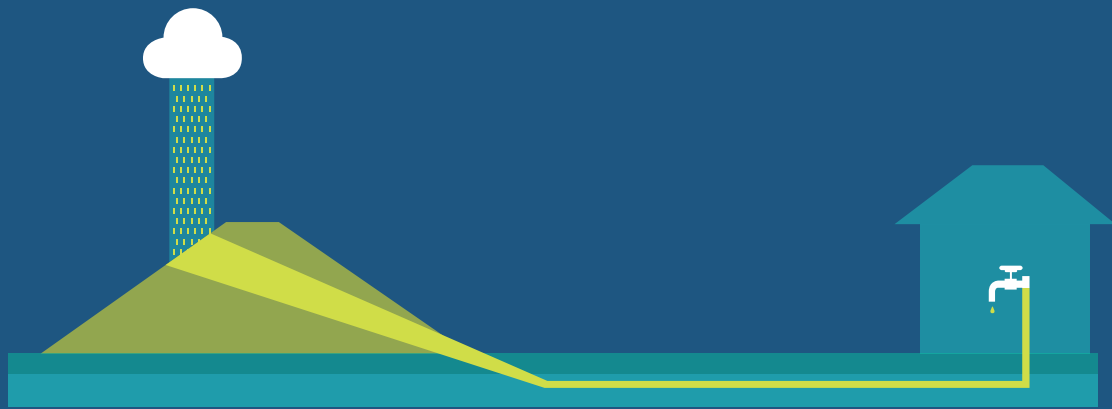


EMG

FACT SHEET SERIES



Why does the water sector need civil society?

Every person has the right to safe clean water.

Civil society plays a critical role in protecting our precious water that flows through rivers, wetlands and underground. It also acts as a protector of every person's right to safe clean water that they can use for drinking, cooking, washing, food growing and other livelihood activities. Government is required by law to include civil society in environmental decision making, including the management of water – but this is happening less and less. This fact sheet will help you understand why civil society is so critical to the protection of life-giving water and what you can do to expand and protect space for civil society.



Why should you include civil society?

It's the **SMART** thing to do

- Civil society has eyes and ears on the ground – it brings information and knowledge you won't otherwise have
- Makes connections that are invisible to other sectors
- Brings indigenous knowledge and other ways of relating to nature (that could save us and our planet)
- Detects 'false solutions'

It's the **LEGAL** thing to do

- Legal obligations to include civil society are contained in many of South Africa's Acts, including NEMA (National Environmental Management Act), PAIA (Promotion of Access to Information Act), PAJA (Promotion of Administrative Justice Act).
- Particular attention needs to be paid to groups that have often been side-lined, including women and youth.

“ NEMA says:

(4) (f) The participation of all interested and affected parties in environmental governance must be promoted, and all people must have the opportunity to develop the understanding, skills and capacity necessary for achieving equitable and effective participation, and participation by vulnerable and disadvantaged persons must be ensured.

(4) (g) Decisions must take into account the interests, needs and values of all interested and affected parties, and this includes recognising all forms of knowledge, including traditional and ordinary knowledge.

(4) (q) The vital role of women and youth in environmental management and development must be recognised and their full participation therein must be promoted.

It's the **RIGHT** thing to do

- Moral obligation to include people affected by decisions
- Civil society acts in the public interest
- Constitutional right to an environment that is not harmful to your health or well-being
- Constitutional right of access to sufficient food and water.

It's the **COURAGEOUS** thing to do

- If you are a civil servant, civil society can be annoying and raise concerns you'd rather not think about, or which fall outside of your job description – a brave person will take on board these issues and work with them.

It's the **SUSTAINABLE** thing to do

- Civil society is the third 'power' that keeps the power of business/industry and government in check. Without it we'd have rampant, run-away capitalism and short-term political expediency – both are deadly to life on planet earth and have resulted in genocides and slavery.
- Water activists hold in their hearts equality, justice, ecological integrity and livelihood security.



What (and who) is civil society?

CIVIL SOCIETY IS PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS

- You
- Anyone who wants to protect water in the public interest – and does something about it (water activists)
- A group of women growing vegetables together
- Traditional or spiritual healers
- Organised workers
- A street committee
- An environment club
- South African Water Caucus* & Provincial Water Caucuses

*The South African Water Caucus is a network of community based organisations, NGOs and individual activists working for water and environmental justice.

CHARACTERISTICS, VALUES AND APPROACH OF CIVIL SOCIETY

- Pollinator – flexible, moves between levels and issues, educates, shares information across sectors and 'levels' of government
- Conscience – draws attention to things that are wrong and that we'd rather not see
- Protector – keeps humans, trees, water, animals and other things safe from abuse by the powerful
- Acts in the public interest – ensures that resources can be shared by all, not just a few
- Monitors actual impact of policy (intended and unintended consequences)
- Recognises and works with traditional and indigenous knowledge
- Brings non-engineering solutions to a technical sphere
- Value based – guided by social equity, justice and ecological integrity

Water activists work for change in three spheres



LOCALLY

Here civil society works to change an immediate problem on the ground. For example, a toxic spill into the river or inadequate service delivery. By working with people in your neighbourhood, you might be able to fix a burst pipe or introduce 'water awareness' into your local school curriculum. However, often local issues require action in the other two spheres too.



POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Civil society is an excellent monitor of government's promises. In the water sector many demonstrations, commissions of enquiry and legal action are initiated by civil society groups to hold government accountable to its legal obligation to provide everyone with sufficient and dignified water and sanitation.



MOVEMENT BUILDING

Civil society seldom acts in isolation of a bigger intention, which is to build the water and environmental justice movement. It is by mobilising and connecting local struggles that a bigger force emerges to build a society that is characterised by equality, solidarity, meaningful work and care for the natural world.



What do water activists monitor?

RIVERS

Government is failing to protect our rivers from industrial toxins and sewage. Many rivers have dwindled to trickles due to over-abstraction, timber plantations and mono-crops such as sugar cane. Civil society acts to protect rivers from abuse.

FALSE SOLUTIONS

False solutions are being promoted to address one-or-more aspects of climate change. For example, advocates of fracking say that it will mitigate climate change because gas burns more cleanly than coal, yet this does not take into account the full life cycle of gas production or the impacts on our precious water resources. Civil society points out the falseness of many of these 'solutions'.

WATER DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Water demand management is proposed as a way to address water scarcity. However it is often implemented in a way that forces poor households to survive on less water than they need, whilst allowing those who can pay as much water as they want. Civil society shows the hypocrisy and lack of humanity in this approach.

WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

Water and sanitation services are essential to build resilience to climate change. Sadly there are signs that services are deteriorating and more than one infant has died due to poor municipal water quality. Civil society puts pressure on government to improve services. Some communities and development organisations step in and provide services where government has limited capacity.

HIGH CARBON EMITTERS

High carbon emitters make endless excuses why they can't reduce their contribution to climate change. Civil society points out why this is destroying our precious planet, and names and shames companies and governments that aren't doing enough to cut their carbon emissions.

FUTURE GENERATIONS

Future generations will bear the brunt of current greenhouse gas emissions. Civil society acts on their behalf.

“Civil society acts to protect rivers from abuse.”





Tips for activists and government officials

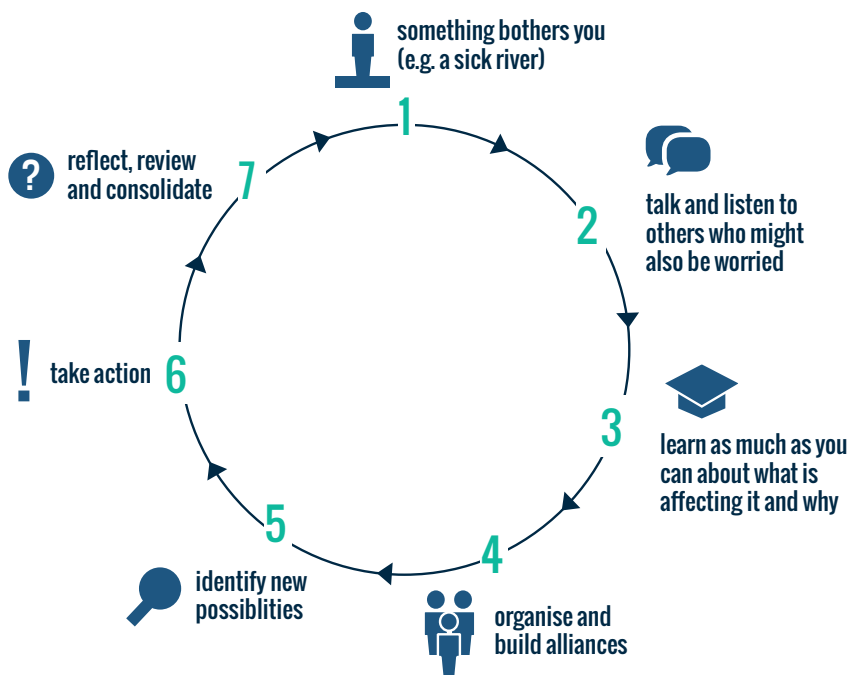
TIPS FOR ACTIVISTS (IN ENGAGING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS)

- Use existing forums to talk to officials
- Get the Minister on your side
- Ally yourself with sympathetic academics, scientists and lawyers
- Remind officials that they are required by law to include citizens in decision making
- Cultivate links with regional officials

TIPS FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS (IN ENGAGING WITH ACTIVISTS)

- Build long term relations in ongoing processes (not just ad hoc invitation to meetings)
- Make budgets available for transport
- Treat all forms of knowledge with respect
- Translate material and have interpreters present at meetings
- Practice your listening skills

Chain from worried and whinging to action and change



- 1** E.g. sick river or women carrying heavy water buckets;
- 2** Your view is drawn from your life-history and values; listening to others will give you a broader perspective;
- 3** The more you know and understand the more likely you'll be able to act in an effective way;
- 4** Everyone needs friends – you can ally yourself with academics, existing organisations, etc.;
- 5** How and at what level can you bring about change?
- 6** E.g. start a social media campaign, install a rainwater tank.

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