

## Conference to highlight critical role of groundwater in SADC

The first annual Groundwater Conference will be hosted by SADC-GMI at the Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26-28 September. The theme of the event is 'Adapting to climate change in the SADC region through water security - a focus on groundwater'.



Image source: [www.watereducation.org](http://www.watereducation.org)

The conference aims to give much needed impetus to raising awareness of the critical role of groundwater in meeting development challenges in the face of climate change across the SADC region.

### Elevating groundwater in conversations

SADC-GMI's executive director James Sauramba said there is a need to elevate groundwater in conversations about water security. "SADC protocols and national policies and legislation don't talk much about the significance of groundwater yet estimates are that about 70% of the population in the SADC region relies on groundwater," he said.

In addition, the conference deliberations will explore sub-themes of promoting climate change resilience through transboundary aquifer management and conjunctive surface and groundwater management in the SADC region; as well as working towards an understanding of the impacts of climate change on groundwater resources and exploring climate-smart groundwater infrastructure options.

Sauramba stressed the demand for informed decision-making on groundwater.

"Climate change demands integrated use of water resources. As facilitators in transboundary projects, we work with decision-makers at government and regional level. We see ourselves as an important driver of socioeconomic development in the SADC region," Sauramba said.

### Keynote speakers

The keynote speakers, including Dr Karen G. Villholth (IMWI-SA), Professor Jason Gurdak (UNESCO – IHP), Roger Parsons (Parsons & Associates), Dhesigen Naidoo (Water Research Commission, South Africa), Callist Tindimugaya (International Association of Hydrologists) and Gavin Kode (Western Cape Government, South Africa) will tackle groundwater’s critical role in dealing with development, economic and environmental challenges.

Dr Villholth will review shared development challenges posed by climate change while Prof. Gurdak will explore why climate change is among the most critical environmental challenges of the 21st century. Kode will share how the Western Cape government used its Water Business Continuity Programmes to ensure water supply continued during the drought in Cape Town. Naidoo will address the critical role of adaptation ensuring water-energy-food security, while Tindimugaya will focus on groundwater's role in the national development strategies of African countries.

Sauramba emphasised the importance of finding solutions to improve the lives of the SADC community and to support urban growth and industrial development, irrigation in the agricultural sector and to service demands in the mining sector.

“We will continue developing solutions on pertinent groundwater topics. Besides the research that we do, we also want to attract large-scale funding to support member states to implement large-scale infrastructure projects,” Sauramba said.

SADC-GMI is hosting the conference in collaboration with UNESCO, IGRAC, the Government of South Africa, IWMI, GWP-SA and GRIPP.

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