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Alternative Water Futures' Developing a water reclamation decision pathway survey

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ABSTRACT

The water situation that South Africa is currently facing needs to be effectively dealt with in order to sustain water supply to the country for the many years to come. Despite being a valuable resource, water is becoming an extremely scarce resource within the world. The rate that water is used at exceeds the rate that water is replenished at and there is an increasing demand for water in South Africa which is seen to be driven by growing populations, growing industrial development, rising incomes, irrigation expansion, a non-renewable electricity generation as well as a host of other factors. There needs to be a strong effort from the South African population in water preservation through water reuse. Despite the many advantageous reasons for the implementation of water reuse, one of the largest challenges that the country is facing in the water reuse project is public acceptance. The aims of this research are to take a 'people's perspective' and to understand and focus on the people of South Africa and their attitudes and feelings towards using alternative water sources such as reclaimed water. Public acceptance of environmental policies is the driving force to creating meaningful environmental change. People's behaviours in making decisions is often driven by their understanding, trust, values, and subjective norms. This research aims to understand the people of South Africa and their willingness or lack thereof, to make use of reclaimed water for potable and non-potable uses. In order to do so, the development of an instrument that will identify underlying decision-making processes is necessary. The development of a 'Water Reclamation Decision Pathway Survey' was the core aim of this research as this tool will assist environmental policy makers in understanding the various social and psychological barriers that the consumers of South Africa have for or against using reclaimed water. This research redeveloped Gregory, Flynn, Johnson, Satterfield, Slovic and Wagner's (1997) Decision Pathway Survey in a South African context with the core focus being reclaimed water. This research was qualitative in nature and data was collected through the use of three focus groups with laypeople from WitsPlus and a private advertising agency in Johannesburg and they will consist of six participants each. The researcher then conducted six one-on-one interviews with water experts from the water industry. The data was transcribed, and a thematic analysis was done in order to identify recurring themes regarding the acceptance or rejection of using reclaimed water as well as the psychological and social barriers that water users have towards reclaimed water. This assisted in developing the various decision pathways that individuals embark on when making environmental choices.

Keywords: *Water Reclamation, Decision-Making, environmental change, public acceptance Decision Pathway, Psychological and Social Barriers.*