



PREFACE

This report describes the development of water resource management organisations (institutions) in the Kat River Valley from 1997 to 2006. The two organisations described here – the Kat River Valley Water User Association and the Kat River Catchment Forum – are given separate narratives for the sake of clarity, although they developed in close association. Both these organisations were nurtured and supported as a result of a research process by members of the Catchment Research Group (CRG) from the Department of Geography at Rhodes University. Funding came largely through the Water Research Commission (WRC).

An initial version of this report was written in 2003 but was not published. At that time the report was written from the perspective of the Catchment Research Group researchers, Jane Burt, Alistair McMaster and Kate Rowntree. They drew on reports, plus a masters and doctoral thesis, to synthesise the many voices that had contributed to the development of the Water User Association and the Catchment Forum. The story was told as the researchers saw it, giving a reflection of how they understood it.

At the beginning of 2006, Jane Burt was approached by the Water Research Commission to update and finalise the report for publication. She decided that the best way to update the report would be to ask the people in the Kat River Valley what had happened and how they felt about the future of their organizations. The WRC agreed to this approach, providing additional funding for some interviews and to employ the professional editing services of Robert Berold and Mindy Stanford to help restructure and compile the report. Unfortunately there was not enough money to interview every Catchment Forum and Water User Association (WUA) management committee member. People were therefore interviewed according to their availability and willingness during the time allocated for the interviews, with a fair number contributing. The report in its present form therefore reflects the thoughts of both the original researchers and the people of the Kat River WUA and the Kat River Catchment Forum.



The developments described here were taking place at a time of great change in South Africa's political and institutional structures, both locally and nationally. The Kat River Valley was one of the first catchments in the country to set up water management structures. At the time there was no clear direction from the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWA) about requirements for the WUA process, nor was there a clear policy in relation to Catchment Forums. Researchers, practitioners and the members of the various institutions had to learn as they went along.

As is the case with many journeys into the unknown, with the benefit of hindsight the researchers can see that many things could have been done more effectively. Nicole Motteux and Kate Rowntree, who were pioneers of the work in the Kat River Valley, always emphasized that we must not be afraid of making mistakes, as this is integral to learning. This report offers a reflection on what worked and what did not. The researcher authors hope that the story will be useful to others who are grappling with how to implement the National Water Act in a way that honours the Act's principles of equity, sustainability and efficiency.

