

Stakeholder connectedness and participatory water resource management in South Africa

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Abstract

Establishment of catchment management agencies (CMAs) is central to South Africa's new policy vision for achieving decentralised, participatory integrated water resource management. However, CMAs cannot directly engage every individual stakeholder – inputs will need to be channelled via a hierarchical representation system. The issue of 'connectedness' is crucial: how do interest groupings interact across and between scales? Research in the Inkomati catchment suggests that current levels of organisation, communication and capacity could result in inequitable, unsustainable participatory decisions. Large imbalances in degree of organisation and negotiating power exist between different sectors and regions. Though some cooperative initiatives exist, there appears to be a greater focus on engaging government or legal processes, contrary to the intentions of the new water policy. Suggested interventions include: capacity building for disadvantaged groups; facilitation of catchment-based fora as vehicles for co-learning and relationship-building; and educating all stakeholders about the new water policy. All must create awareness of benefits of engaging other stakeholders and the future CMA, and thus an imperative for resource users to align themselves towards this goal.

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