

# Water User Associations in South Africa

Evolving interpretations and consequences on  
newly established associations

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# Content

- Different perceptions
- Evolution
- Reasons
- Consequences

# Different perceptions of WUA

## Chapter 8 (NWA):

*“Water user associations [...] are in effect co-operative associations of individual water users who wish to undertake water-related activities for their mutual benefit.”*

*“The Minister establishes and disestablishes water user associations”*

*“The Minister may exercise control over them by giving them directives or by temporarily taking over their functions under particular circumstances.”*

- Two perceptions at odds in one Act
  - ‘Co-operative associations’: name with a long tradition; users’ control; users’ interests; 1<sup>st</sup> generation WUA (1 scheme – 1 WUA)
  - ‘Third tier institution’: top-down creation; control from the top; common good, state’s interests; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation WUA (multiple users, semi-regional WUA)

# Balance and evolution

- A tension embedded in IWRM
- Problem: not different positions but unresolved tension
- From 2000, shift in favour of top-down approach:
  - More and more often in documents
  - ‘common good’, *‘interest of the general public even those that are not participants in the WUA’* (2007)
- In practice, proposition for:
  - Wall-to-wall coverage
  - Compulsory WUA membership
  - While in official discourse still ‘co-operative associations’

# Reasons

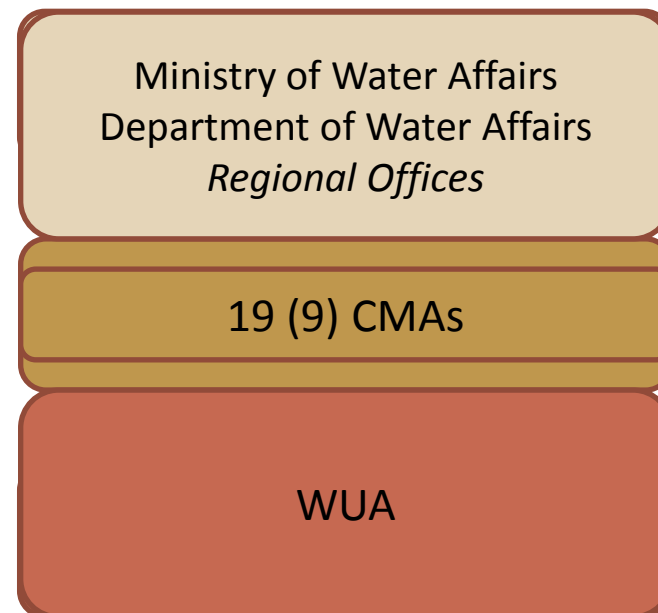
- Ideological and structural reasons

# Reasons - ideological

- National redemption
  - WUA as mediums of equity, solidarity, social cohesion
    - Ressource poor farmers, commercial farmers, farm workers come together and work together for the benefit of all
- National sacrifice
  - Necessary involvment/effort of all to fulfill development and reconstruction objectives
    - All the way since 1994, task at hand not only that of the state

# Reasons - structural

- Delays in creation of CMAs: institutional void
  - CMA: water management institution *par excellence* (NWA)
  - Two way compensation



# Consequences

- Top-down definition of WUA characteristics
  - Making WUA membership compulsory?
  - WUA-projects, wall-to-wall coverage plans
- ‘Instrumental rationality of participation’
  - Participation-consultation vs participation-action
  - Creation of WUA becomes a passive act
  - Example of Sekhukhune WUA: *‘I am the Chairperson. I just don’t know what I am the Chairperson of.’*
  - Example of Nzhelele WUA: gazetted in 2005, in 2011 no business plan, no new elections
  - Example of Mpumalanga former IB: control vs desire of independence



# Conclusions

- Importance of a choice
- State institution or co-operative association?
  - Different logics and conditions of creation
  - Different logics of legitimacy
- End goal – balancing the Department's needs, public good and water users' sense of control
- But feeling of control of water management strongly lacking from small irrigation schemes



THANK YOU



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