

A REAL REVOLUTION

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Abstract.

“A real revolution in Water Resource Management is not brought about until people concerned have gained the power to manage their own resources as much as possible.” (*The Secretariat of the 3rd World Water Forum in “Water Voices” March 2003*). In response to this realization, sustainable approaches to water resource management are being founded on the principle of inclusivity and participation.

Public participation in the management of water resources at different levels is one of the cornerstones of the National Water Policy in South Africa, but its effective implementation remains a major challenge, particularly with respect to individuals disadvantaged by previous water legislation. Catchment Management Forums (CMFs) represent a form of Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) which aim to bring together all major stakeholders in a new form of communication and decision-making in a designated catchment.

Perspectives emerging from the case studies being undertaken in the Eastern Cape Province suggest that the success of MSPs in implementing catchment management in South Africa lies in allowing community stakeholders drive the process. This paper takes up a political definition of participation whereby marginalised and excluded groups get into a position to increase their share of control and influence over decisions and resources affecting their lives.

Keywords: Water resource management, Participation, Multi-Stakeholder Platforms, Partnerships, Institution, Capacity building, Enabling environment, Stakeholders.

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IWRM - GOOD INTENTIONS?

The need to achieve sustainable water use currently and for the future has resulted in a profound global shift from technocratic, state controlled systems to catchment based stakeholder participatory water governance. Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) is now interpreted to include decentralization and democratization of water management, from national level state authorities to catchments, watersheds or river basins. The idea is that multiple stakeholders, who have different interests and needs with respect to water, should organize and arrange water allocation, distribution and management issues among themselves. Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) are an emerging and exciting concept to democratise catchment management, a traditionally technocratic affair.

MSP is a discourse that seems to have found increasing acceptance and support among water administrators, managers and users alike. Multi-Stakeholder Platforms for water resource negotiations aim to achieve collective agency in managing the resource through fostering understanding of the involved resource. However as strides are made in policy implementation of participatory water resource management, gaps between policy prescription and empirical practice begin to become vividly apparent. The imagined result begins to diverge from practice and reality begins to deviate from the plans.

By and large, lessons continue to recur, that to promote IWRM really means promoting a change in behaviour in society, placing people and not water, firmly at the centre. Catchment management requires major and new relationship-building exercises involving all levels of government and stakeholders. The challenge is to enable organisations and scientific discipline to achieve a measure of interrelatedness so as to better understand and hence manage within the water world (the "fifth discipline") (WISA. 2000),

STAKEHOLDER DICHOTOMY

The notion of '*multi-stakeholders*' is derived from the existence of a variety of water users who have a '*stake*' in water resource within a designated catchment. *Stakeholders* are therefore water users who may be individuals or groups from all sectors such as agriculture, industry, communication, leisure as well as local

residents. In essence, every human being can be regarded as a stakeholder since everyone is a water user. In South African philosophy, "stakeholder participation" in most instances is explained as "public participation". "Public" can be ascribed to everyone. DWAF invitations to stakeholder meetings are addressed to "all interested and relevant individuals and groups" (DWAF. 2001a). Based on South African usage and application of the term *stakeholder*, a conclusion can be reached that stakeholders in South African context seem to be identified as any individual or group that shows interest in actively participating in the water management process as well as any relevant individual or group whose participation in the water management process is prerequisite to achieving the set objectives.

Categorisation of stakeholders can be a complex exercise. This is because stakeholders are social actors who may take different roles, all of which qualify them as a stakeholder, such as farmer, community member as well as representative of a government department all at the same time. For the purpose of the argument presented in this paper, a simplified perspective of only two categories of stakeholders is used; *community stakeholders* and *organisational stakeholders*. While it is fact that everyone that exists in a catchment holds a 'stake' in the water resource, (as no one can hope to live very long without any water usage), it is mainly the local residents, mostly poor and living in the outlying areas of the urban centres, hereby referred to as the '*local community*', on whom the status of the natural resource has the highest impact. For this group, the livelihood system depends on the status of the natural resource. The uncertainty of their lives includes the hydrological status of the catchment. This group of stakeholders that may or may not be a homogenous group can be holistically classified and referred to as *community stakeholders*. Then there is "*the rest*" of stakeholders, who may or may not reside in the catchment, whose interest ("*stake*") in the water resource emanate from their role as administrators (such as local government institutions like the municipality), or resource managers (such as government departments) resource users (such as industries and private businesses) and welfare promoters (such non governmental organisations). These differences in the residential and interest status of different stakeholders are also a source of conflicts on the utilisation of the water resource.

SOUTH AFRICA'S IMPLEMENTATION OF MSPs

The National Water Policy for South Africa (Act 36 of 1998) adopted catchment management as the approach to integrated water resources management. It is a process and an implementation strategy intended to achieve equitable access to and sustainable use of water resources by all stakeholders at catchment, regional, national and international levels, while maintaining the characteristics and integrity of water resources at the catchment scale within agreed limits (DWAF, 1998).

To achieve adequate integrated water resource management, South Africa has been demarcated into 19 hydrological boundaries called Water Management Areas (WMA) whose boundaries traverse provincial and local government boundaries. Within each of the Water Management Area, a Catchment Management Agency (CMA) is required to be established. CMAs become responsible for the implementation of Water Management Strategies in their designated areas. The Act also encompasses the subsidiary principle in the water resources management (Uijterlinde et al, 2003). Under the principle of subsidiarity, water resource management is devolved to the lowest appropriate level. At a micro-level, are Catchment Management Forums (CMFs), which are non-statutory institutions. They are responsible for drafting the catchment management strategy for their designated catchment and actively participate in initiating the consultation process for establishing a Catchment Management Agency, which is a statutory body.

In South African context, the notion of MSP can be ascribed to the Catchment Management Forums since they are intended to represent a "committee" of stakeholders with a stake in water within their designated catchment. The establishment of Forums in each catchment is said to constitute the first level of cooperative governance. It is the level at which community members forge partnership with government departments, industries, private businesses and non-governmental organizations that operate in the catchment to negotiate the optimum utilization of catchment water resources. These Forums are intended to provide a mechanism for communication, cooperation and decision-making between stakeholders and the wider hydrological institutional environment.

Despite the many different stakeholders and interests that exist within a catchment, Forums are intended to be viable systems for incorporating diversity. However, the manner in which different interests (stakes) should be represented remains a thorny issue. In South African water philosophy, all (*all!*) stakeholders are to receive equal representation. Yet in practice stakeholders are not always self-selecting and self-motivated, they are often invited to participate by external facilitators or present themselves as an organised interest group. This necessarily puts potentially interested, but unorganised parties or individuals at a disadvantage. A popular practical way of bringing stakeholders onboard has been to just go down the list of water-related groups (and individuals) and bring them together around the table. As a result, representation has strongly been biased towards well-organised interests - such as organisational stakeholders. It is possible that there may be pressing rationales for setting representative quotas on the basis of who is critically affected by status of the resource.

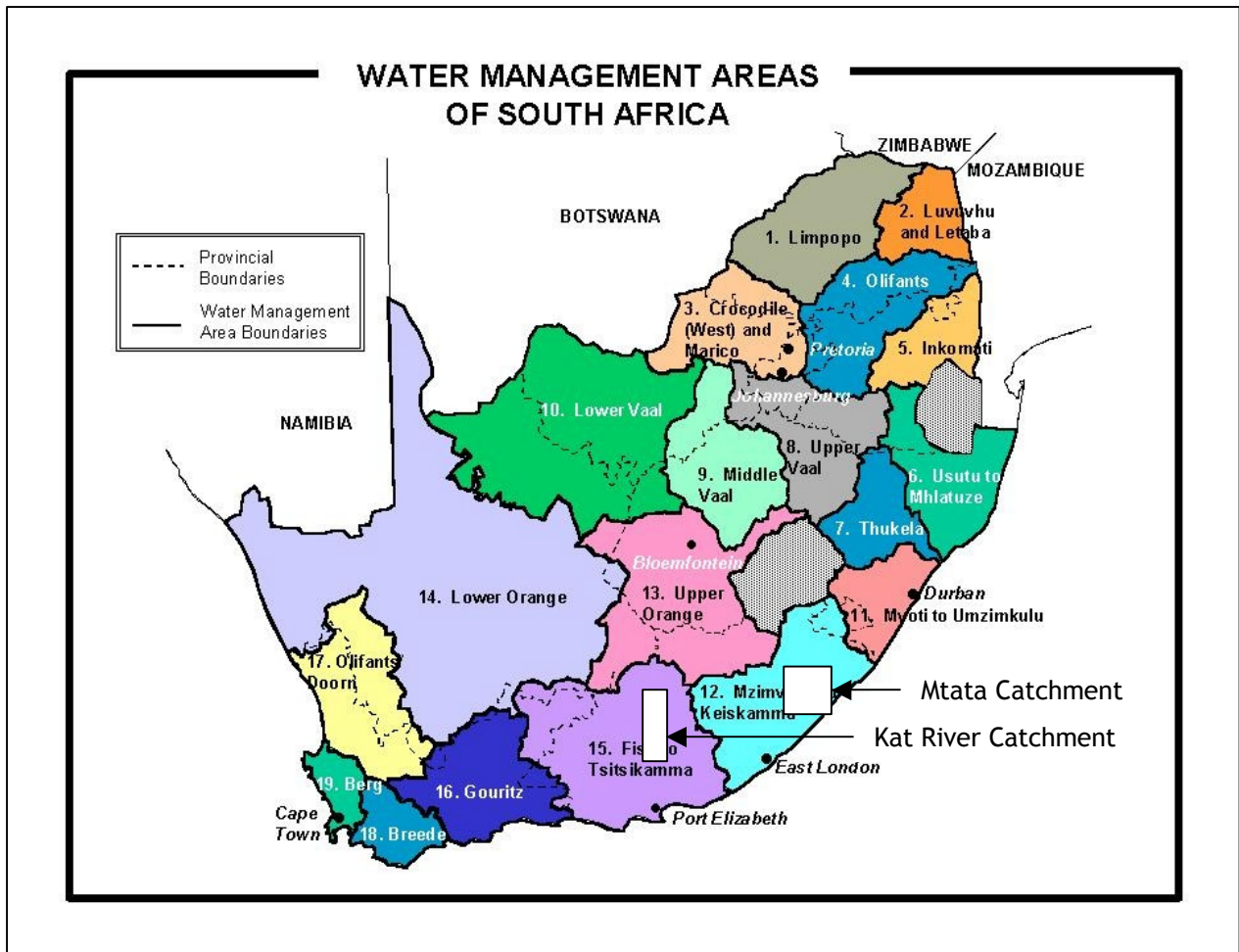
A TALE OF TWO CATCHMENTS

This article extracts lessons from experiences emerging from the inception and functioning of two different Catchment Management Forums in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, in Water Management Areas (WMA) 12 and 15 (**Map 1** on next page).

In the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and within the borders of an area formerly known as Transkie, lies the Mtata Catchment. The catchment falls within the Water Management Area 12 and is made up of three secondary catchments covering a total area of approximately 5500 km². The Mtata River is the major river draining the catchment with an average natural mean annual runoff of 382 million m³ per annum (DWAF 2001b). The catchment is generally hilly with rivers draining deep valleys towards the southern coast into the Indian Ocean.

The 1995 population census figures of the Mtata Catchment indicate a population of 630 047 and a 2005 projection of 657 425 (DWAF 2001b). It is estimated that 91% of the population is rural, living in small and remote villages. The only major town is Umtata, which used to be the governmental capital of the Transkei homeland during apartheid. The town functions as the centre for trade and business in the region. The

main land use system is veld and grazing followed by settlements and subsistence agriculture. The Mtata Catchment is generally under-developed, and the area is characterised by a high degree of unemployment and high poverty levels. For a long time, the main economic base of the catchment has been the government sector, but has been shrinking since 1994 following the migration of the government provincial offices to another town (Bisho), about 250 kilometres away from the catchment.



Map 1. General position of the Mtata and Kat River Catchments.

The formation of the Catchment Management Forum (CMF) in Umtata was initiated by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) in 1999 and was undertaken with the help of private consultants. Series of workshops were held in the villages to inform local people of the purpose of a Catchment Management Forum. By April 2001, after a series of consultations with potential stakeholders, the Catchment Management Forum was inaugurated. The Forum had representatives from local communities (villages outlying Umtata town), representatives from Community Based Organisations, The University of Transkei, Non Governmental Organisations,

traditional leaders and representatives from local municipalities (six municipalities) and the Departments of Water Affairs, Agriculture, and Environmental Affairs. However, the Forum became dominated by representatives of government departments, municipal workers and staff of the University of Transkei which is based in the main town of Umtata.

DWAF selected the Mtata Catchment as a project for water resource management that would involve public participation. The Mtata River has been subjected to a fairly high level of stress. One example is the pollution of the section of the river that crosses the town center at an area called circus triangle. Local residents and small informal enterprises dump all kinds of waste materials alongside the banks of the river all of which eventually end up into the river. Other pollutants include untreated sewage discharges from the surrounding squatter camps and from a nearby prison. It has been difficult for the Forum to address this problem due to insufficient representation support from the community and lack of capacity within the responsible local municipality.

Participation of community stakeholders has been problematic right from the inception of the Forum. It is reported that even if the three sub-regional workshops held in villages provided adequate coverage of the communities in the catchment area, it was noted that more time and money for publicity was needed, especially at grass-roots level, to address the poor attendance of community members at meetings and workshops (RDA, 2001).

The Forum has held eleven meetings since its inception. Attendance numbers indicate that fewer and fewer community stakeholders come to the meetings. Individual opinions of organisational stakeholders interviewed attributed the falling interest among community stakeholders to an initial misunderstanding of what the Forum was. They accused grass-root level community members of being full of unrealistic expectations.

Organisational Stakeholders also present a different kind of apathy towards the Forum. If they manage to attend the meeting at all, they tend to send new faces at every subsequent Forum meeting. As a result, there is poor continuity in dealing with

issues discussed at previous meetings. Meetings are usually held in a ten-story concrete and glass building which houses DWAF offices, and sometimes in a hotel in the heart of the city. Most of those who attend meetings are city dwellers representing organisational stakeholders (mainly government departments and municipalities). They either walk to the meeting place or drive from their offices in their departmental cars. The meeting is conducted in an atmosphere of formality and procedure. Interaction styles remain those that appeal to the sensibilities of expert systems. It is rare for grass-root level participants to actually speak in the meeting, unless for influential community leaders who are already acquaintances of government officials.

DWAF can be identified as the driving force behind the Mtata Catchment Forum. It pays a consultant to function as secretariat to the Forum, ensuring that all necessary Forum operations such as organising meetings and circulating documents to members are undertaken. Community stakeholders also see DWAF as being responsible for ensuring that they are reimbursed for their cost of attending Forum meetings.

About 350 kilometers to the west of Mtata Catchment lies the Kat River Valley catchment. The Kat river is a tributary of the Great Fish River and falls within the Water Management Area 15. The catchment extends approximately 80km north to south and covers an area of approximately 1700km². It is characterised by a variety of land uses, ranging from export-oriented citrus farming and commercially oriented rangeland stock farming in the lower reaches of the catchment to community-based or small-scale agriculture and stock farming in the middle reaches of the catchment and commercial forestry in the north-western upper reaches (McMaster, 2002). It includes four game reserves. The area has extensive privately owned white farms with high levels of production. However, the largest number of farmers includes subsistence to emergent black farmers characterised by low levels of production. There exist also a high degree of poverty in the more densely populated sections where unemployment is high.

Among the observed serious environmental problems is soil erosion as a result of steep slopes that characterise the geography of the catchment. This problem has led to an increasing sediment output, which is seriously affecting the health of the river. Other

problems include over-fertilization, litter, water-pollution, reduced tree and grass cover, sand extraction for building, and the removal of culturally valued resources, such as plants and clay (Motteux *et al.*, 2001).

The Kat River Catchment Forum emerged at about the same time period as the Mtata Catchment. Unlike the Mtata Catchment, the Kat River Catchment Forum emerged as a result of activities of researchers from Rhodes University. Researchers from Rhodes University undertook anthropological research in 1996 and 1997 that resulted into workshops in 17 villages from late 1999 to mid 2000. The aim of these workshops was to create environmental awareness (co-operative and responsible resource management), introducing the concept of a Water User Association (WUA) and facilitating an understanding of the need for a Catchment Forum. Upstream-downstream relationships between the villages was role-played and analysed. Later workshops elected representatives from each village that would participate in the Forum (Motteux and McMaster, 2002). The main thrust of activities of researchers from Rhodes University was on facilitating stakeholder participation in the initiation of the transformation of the Irrigation Board to Water User Association (Motteux, 2001). The awareness creation conducted through Participatory Rural Appraisal methods led to the build-up of the formation of the Catchment Forum in which broader issues relating to catchment management could be tackled.

Since the focus of Rhodes University researchers' activities was on the empowerment of previously disadvantaged communities, the Catchment Management Forum became dominated by a high representation of community members. The Forum is well rooted into the community structure of the rural Kat River areas. Commitment of organisational stakeholders in the Forum is however minimal.

The Kat River Catchment Forum is actively engaged with a Land-care Project intended to address the erosion problem. The project is run by community stakeholders and funded by the Department of Agriculture. Despite the existing lack of management skills and project management experience among the community, the operations are proceeding very well. The Land-care project offers a platform for capacity building and empowerment. Experiences with the financial and organisational aspects of the project provide a way to gain important management skills and confidence.

At a joint workshop between the Mtata and Kat River Catchments held in January 2003, participating stakeholders summarized the differences between the two Forums as presented in the table below:

Differences between the two Forums

KAT RIVER FORUM	MTATA RIVER FORUM
<i>The Kat River Valley Catchment originated from the initiative of local people who wanted to address problems of land acquisition, conservation as well as limited water resources.</i>	<i>The Mtata Forum was initiated by the Provincial Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.</i>
<i>The Forum is composed of mainly youth from the surrounding communities and projects.</i>	<i>The Mtata Forum has a majority of adults who come from various institutions and organisations. It also has District Municipality and Local Municipality representatives.</i>
<i>This forum does not receive any financial support from government.</i>	<i>This Forum enjoys some financial and administrative support from DWAF.</i>

MORAL OF THE STORY

The framework for stakeholder partnership arrangements in catchment management is arguably notoriously difficult to establish. However, lessons being learned point to a need to apply the hard-won lessons ... community driven participatory approaches have great potential for success. The approach taken by Rhodes researchers in the Kat River Catchment is essentially bottom-up institution building for pro-poor catchment management. Local people, including women, are mobilized to take interest in their environment. While the Kat river case places greater emphasis on social mobilization, the Mtata case is characterized by a dominance of organizational stakeholders over community stakeholders leading to a gradual withdraw of community representation on the Forum. Community stakeholders tend to opt out of partnerships when they feel that they are voiceless.

Wester et. al. (2003), commenting on the stakeholder participation in river basin management in Mexico and South Africa, argue that in cases where the process is driven by government agencies as the major stakeholders, the process is essentially driven by a combination of technical and economic concerns and interagency politics. There is no room in such approaches for less organized, “informal” interests, especially poor people, to fully participate and gain access to water resources. This perception is confirmed by the reaction to the Basin Study report presented by a consulting engineer to the second Mtata Catchment Forum meeting. Community stakeholders complained that the presentation was just too technical that it was difficult for them to be able to translate the information for their respective constituencies (DWAF, 2001).

A review of the tale of the two catchments can allow us to extract useful lessons that raise a number of questions to be resolved through further investigation in participatory water governance, specifically with regards to the appropriate partnerships for participating stakeholders. A whole variety of different arrangements can undoubtedly be considered, but the priority should be to identify the optimum arrangement in terms of service delivery to local people. While it is true that there is no blueprint for the most appropriate arrangement for stakeholder representation, successful decentralisation has to recognise the central role of local people.

Since catchment development projects demand a change in the lifestyles of the village, we can begin to argue that the kind of partnership arrangement required is that which involves the complete participation of the affected people, where they are responsible for the planning, implementation and monitoring of the project. When work plans, implementation and decisions are made together between community stakeholders and organisational stakeholders, weight should be given to community stakeholders.

Catchment management is possible only when the creative potential of the people is awakened, mobilised and organised in such a way that they constitute themselves into a self-help group oriented towards rejuvenating and managing their “sphere of survival” to a long-term benefit. The role of organisational stakeholders is mainly that of being catalyst and advocate. Organisational Stakeholders, led by the government,

have a major role of mobilizing the latent power of the local people, accompanying them and empowering them by putting them in contact with existing development institutions. This is because organisational stakeholders already have established links with the wider institutional environment for ensuring sustainable water resources management. But Organisational Stakeholders may not substitute local peoples own initiative and responsibility, an act that could erode the latent ability of local people to take initiative.

In Eastern Cape Province, Community Stakeholders constitute largely the previously disadvantaged communities whose participation may be secured only through concerted effort to empower them. Without this recognition, Organisational Stakeholders will talk on their behalf backed by the assumption that through community studies, they know what poor people aspire for.

Securing locally driven and locally sustained efforts is a challenge that water resource management practitioners in South Africa ought to be aware of. It takes the form beyond merely securing the participation of marginal and disadvantaged groups to building a self-sustaining participation momentum, dealing with inevitable tensions between powerful and weak stakeholders, growth and equity objectives, development and redress imperatives. Efforts that put local people at the central focus help to develop the catchment vision. In effect, the constant negotiations and time spent on developing stakeholder platforms should place the communities where they should be - at the centre stage of their own development. Caplan, et al. (2001) argues that years of development experience suggest that without some sense of ownership given to and taken by poor communities, projects at the local level are not likely to be sustainable.

On the other hand, when community stakeholders are left to operate without support from organizational stakeholders, as the case is in the Kat River Catchment, they tend to be treated as though they were informal organisations and end up marginalized. Organisational stakeholders have specific advantage over community stakeholders, they can provide a way for community stakeholders to have their voice heard - serving as one recourse mechanism for the poor people's complaints. This role is especially useful when regulatory institutions are weak or inaccessible to the poor, as most municipalities in Eastern Cape Province are.

A CASE FOR COMMUNITY DRIVEN MSPs

Equal partnership arrangements among stakeholders are by no means an undesirable arrangement. However it is known that in such arrangements, some decisions are reached that result in a situation where the beneficial traditional, cultural and institutional mechanisms are eroded by the introduction of exogenous management systems into the local communities (Bothends/Gomukh, 2002). On the other hand, the central participation of local people provides the catchment projects the legitimacy required to engage with local and traditional leadership as well as national and regional governmental agencies.

From a social democratic perspective, including the poor and achieving substantive stakeholder representation in catchment management is premised on the redistribution of power and resources to enable citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives (Wester et al. 2003). Considering that water is a politically contested resource, and being aware of the fact that areas such as the Eastern Cape Province constitute historically marginalized areas due to the legacy of apartheid, social phenomena that have their roots in inequitable, authoritarian (top down) and inappropriate institutional frameworks inherited from the colonial era have a substantial negative impact on attempts to transform the water sector. In these areas, the legacy of apartheid has generated such vast inequalities. Attempts to incorporate previously marginalized communities into stakeholder groups so that they can provide input into the catchment management process cannot be realised without consideration for empowerment through awareness raising, knowledge and skills-based support.

Notwithstanding, the assumption that resource use is, or could be, regulated unproblematically by handing over to “community structures” would reflect outdated social theory, contradicted by more recent perspectives and empirical evidence that indicates that community stakeholders have poor access to information and lack capacity to implement, monitor and shape the world around them. The participatory role of other stakeholders such as local government, NGOs, industry and private sector businesses as active partners in the MSP remains an essential element in the initiative. For community stakeholders, participating in water resource management is not a project process nor a policy implementation, but rather a way in which they apply their skills and knowledge to the care of natural resources and environment while satisfying their livelihood needs.

CONCLUSION

In South Africa’s Integrated Catchment Management, enabling legislation is in place for all stakeholders to fully participate in catchment management. The challenge remains with the development of various policy clarifications, guidelines and regulations to institute reforms in institutional development. Adequate effort has to be exerted to build the needed capacity in marginalized groups, especially women to relate to water resource management issues in a way that contributes to the betterment of their lives.

As CMFs continue to emerge in different styles in the various catchments in South Africa, policymakers and water resource management experts in South Africa admit that it will take a while before the concept and practice of participatory basin management is properly resolved and understood (Republic of South Africa, 2000). The Mtata and Kat River cases should be of special interest to water resource management practitioners when considering soliciting community stakeholders’ interest in catchment management.

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