

Inkomati Catchment Management Agency Strategic Adaptive Management

In partnership with the OECD Studies on Water: Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance

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Organisation: Witwatersrand University

Country: South Africa

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Environmental protection

Type:

Launched in: 2009

Overall development time: 6 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

In South Africa, the Inkomati Catchment Management Agency was established in 2006 as part of the National Water Act to implement operational and participative Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Between January and March 2010, the Catchment Management Agency engaged in extensive stakeholder participation (including business, farmers, mining companies, municipalities, civil society, etc.), on a very limited budget (ZAR 500 000), to draft a broadly accepted catchment management strategy.

The strategy was then submitted, with full stakeholder acceptance, to the Department of Water Affairs for the minister's approval. Following this approval, implementation started in 2011 at the catchment scale, mostly through the work of five sub-catchment management fora which are currently the main platforms for stakeholder engagement.

Each falls under the mandate of a specific community officer who is also responsible for public awareness (e.g. in schools and community groups). There are also river operations committees that meet regularly to decide on the management and allocation of water flows. Finally, an annual report by the governing board of the Catchment Management Authority is sent to all stakeholders involved to inform on the progress achieved towards IWRM in the river basin.

Why the innovation was developed

- The SA Water Act of 1998 changed water ownership from a "Riparian rights" system, which favoured privileged white communities, to a communal ownership under the custody of the Government. Everybody's relationship with water was changed with potentially major implications for livelihoods of both the "haves" and "have nots".
 - The law required public participation. Many events for public awareness were set up by the ICMA staff between 2006 and 2009 and these slowly brought stakeholders to the table but in a short time these became talk-shops and frustration grew.
 - When this project began in 2009, there were major concerns about stakeholder fatigue, brought about by many engagements that ended up as "talk shops" and/or failed to deliver tangible benefits to stakeholders.
 - Furthermore, many researchers from all over the world wanted to be part of this first CMA-establishment process and they brought an array of projects and techniques with them. None of these was however holistic with a full, integrated systems perspective, so each left sectors of the stakeholder base, and staff of the ICMA, dissatisfied. We had to develop an engagement process that was durable beyond each engagement and across sectors.
 - This project brought Strategic Adaptive Management (SAM) to the arena. It is a strongly systems-orientated process that promotes participative, consensual, decision making. The SAM framework and process has led to a much more needs-driven approach to research which means that currently researchers engage the staff and work towards providing means to better achieve the CMS. SAM has also evolved a great deal in the course of this project, particularly in the fields of participative planning and decision making.
 - This project is about implementing a critical part of South African water policy: the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies (CMA).
 - It took the government bureaucracy from 1998 to 2006 to establish the first CMA, and then it held the "apron strings so tight" that for the first 2 years of its existence the Inkomati CMA was constrained to "institution building" and had very few operations staff: one hydrologist, one water quality manager, and four public participation officers.
 - The main driver of this project was the need to operationalise the ICMA as a stakeholder centred, adaptive management institution. This is then the main objective of the project and as such it covers all aspects of participative and adaptive IWRM.
- Government
 - Civil society
 - Service providers
 - Water institutions
 - Regulators
 - Agricultural sector
 - Science, academia, and research centres

Results

Efficiency

- Cost-saving: A good example is that a consulting company was paid a few million Rand over three years, and failed to complete a CMS. In the wake of this disaster, in mid-December 2009, the Minister gave the ICMA 4 months and R 500 000 to do the job by end of March 2010. The use of the Adaptive Planning Process allowed us to complete the task in time and within budget. Many people predicted that a stakeholder focussed approach could not be successful in such a short time, but we proved them wrong.
 - Sustainability/Resilience: Consensus abounds and we do not harp on trade-offs because that tends to lead to lose-lose outcomes, and we want the win-win outcomes that come from building consensus.
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Effectiveness

- Capacity-development: The whole project has been about building a confident, effective staff in the ICMA and encouraging that to spill over to the stakeholders. SAM was used to build confidence in the ICMA staff and much will follow from that. Both have happened.
- Broader economic development: This continually takes place in the forums with much of it being implicit rather than explicit. It is much better if it happens in such a social-learning process in a community of practice and is forced by the ICMA.

Development

Design

Initially the main promoter were the CEO and acting CEOs of the ICMA. The project had to deliver a life of its own in order to survive, and the role of individual ICMA staff, especially the more senior staff, in promoting SAM and the type of public engagement it expects, were extremely important. Academic partners have acted as facilitators and the ICMA staff are the doers who engage society to achieve the CMS.

All public engagement processes are being led by ICMA staff, with some guidance from academics, who together have helped formalise the engagement strategy and processes. Three active catchment forums now have independently functioning Executive Committees, the members of which were chosen by the broad stakeholder community.

In the Crocodile Forum, the key stakeholders are emerging as irrigation farmers, biodiversity conservation, industry and municipalities. The Mozambican governance sector is now starting to send delegates. The Upper Komati Forum Executive is dominated by mining, public participation and municipal interests. The Lower Komati forum comprises of mainly irrigation agriculture interests (commercial and emerging farmers and Swaziland as the international upstream user. The interests of all these stakeholders should be self-evident.

Testing

- No methods were used to test the innovation.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- Extensive planning such as for the restructuring of the CMA in 2009, development of the CMS 2010, formulating strategies for forums or for different divisions of the ICMA, is always based on the "Adaptive Planning Process" of Strategic Adaptive Management (Rogers and Luton 2011). Academics and colleagues who have spearheaded SAM have conducted in the region of 50 adaptive planning workshops under a very wide range of circumstances and not one has failed to markedly reduce conflict and to generate a broadly accepted consensus view of the stakeholders' future desires.
- The second level of critical tool is the way meetings, workshops and public engagements are conducted and facilitated. The key strategy in facilitation is simply to seek the concerns, needs and desires of stakeholders and to translate those into action that meets the CMS and national legislation. Basing everything on meeting national legislation alone has proven divisive and unproductive but couching it in terms of what stakeholders want, need, and desire. The means and the ends can both be met at the same time.
- The main platform for public engagement is the sub-catchment forums, each of which falls under the mandate of a specific community officer who is also responsible for general public awareness (in for example schools and community groups) in his/her area. There are also "River Operations Committees" that meet to decide on the management and allocation of flows. Lastly there is an annual report back by the Governing Board to all stakeholders in the Inkomati catchment/Water Management Area.

Resources used:

- Initially, early 2009, Professor Rogers from the University of Witwatersrand funded the project from his own research funds before ICMA was able to contribute.
- Subsequently, (mid 2009 onwards) the project was funded by the Water Research Commission of South Africa, in 3 sequential allotments. The last of these takes the work to March 2015. Initially the national Department of Water Affairs promised funding but this did not materialize so the project was shortened by a year.
- The project initially provided the WRC with a major challenge because it was based on a process of action research in which specific deliverables were not easy to define a-priori. The process and direction of the project had to evolve as the participants (ICMA, stakeholders, research team etc.) learned more about the nature and practice of participative and adaptive IWRM. To their credit the WRC has allowed and even encouraged, this evolution based action research process. The R500 000 to develop the CMS was provided to the ICMA from the National Department. The majority of this was used to fund the public participation process.

Lessons Learned

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- The most important, broad lesson is to not design something first and then take it to the stakeholders for their response. They will always see that as you “announcing” something you have “decided” and so they will attack it and you will end up “defending” it.
 - Never let anyone go to the stakeholders as an expert who has come to solve their problems as you perceive them. This is the most common mistake made. Well-intentioned people put a lot of effort into developing “something” they believe will help the stakeholders with something that they perceive as a problem. Even if that “problem” is non-compliance with policy, this approach is not recommended.
 - Find a way to engage stakeholders on what issues they are grappling with, and help solve those in a way that achieves compliance. Nine times out of ten they will come up with the same issues you have but in a different way. The tenth time they will surprise you with problems and/or solutions you had not thought about. In other words, “serve” your stakeholders without ever assuming that you are the expert, and this will help you to find win-win all the way.
 - A second lesson is that it is very dangerous to have a focus on tackling today’s problems, especially one by one. The present is too fraught with complications to provide a neutral platform. Always work out what a better future would be and work towards that. This “future focus” is the essence of SAM.
 - In the present, people tend to be defensive but in the future they can get excited and committed. If you and your stakeholders are moving towards a desired future, only those present day problems that must be solved to get to the future, need to be dealt with. If you try to “solve the problems of the present you will, by definition, simply stay in the present.
 - Third, develop the frames and habits of mind of someone working in a complex world, and practice them. Break the habit of linear thinking.
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Conditions for success

- Never allow any assumption on the part of staff and especially consultants, of being an expert to even sneak through to the stakeholders.
 - Never tell stakeholders that they “have to” do something. Focus on formulating and moving towards a desired future together. Develop and practice a complexity mind set with appropriate frames and habits of mind.
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Other information

Find a group of stakeholders you need to engage for whatever reason. Get them to spell out all issues that are issues and that need solving. This is usually a long, complex, and sensitive list.

Explain to stakeholders that to solve all of these one by one will be difficult, and explain the merits of “adaptive planning,” and how it helps define a better future and the path to get there.

Point out that you only need to solve those problems which are stopping you from getting there. Ask the stakeholders' permission to try adaptive planning, and explain that when you have finished you will come back to their list to see if anything critical has been left out.