

Coming to the party of their own volition: Interest groups, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase 1 and change in the water sector

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Abstract

Interest groups are omnipresent phenomena of most political societies. They are present because of their attempts to influence public policy and their representation role. These roles are fundamental agential roles. Through these roles interest groups can bring about changes in the water policy arena. This paper will look at some of these changes using the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase 1 as a case study. Through their actions to bring about change, interest groups are drivers of water politics. Interest groups can enhance water policies when they highlight the inherent deficiencies of policies and suggest alternatives for the betterment of policies concerning the welfare of individuals or groups as well as the environment. Water resource managers and decision-makers should therefore be aware of these actors and the roles they are likely to play when influencing aspects of water infrastructure projects. Interest groups can influence water policies even if they are only involved on an informal basis. In other words, governments do not have to go out of their way, so to speak, to involve interest groups; interest groups will come to the party, on their own volition. Said differently, interest groups usually become involved in water policy matters on a voluntary basis whether water policy makers like it or not.