

**Nepad man in bribe scandal**  
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**By Estelle Ellis**

Johannesburg: A top adviser for the New Partnership for Africa's Development has been implicated in a multimillion-rand bribery scandal.

It is alleged that Reatile Mochebelele, the Midrand-based adviser to Nepad on water affairs and sanitation, was paid to secure contracts for the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

He has been named by the government of Lesotho as the recipient of more than DM1 million (about R3.9 million) in bribes during his tenure as the chief delegate of the government of Lesotho on the Highlands Water Commission from 1996 to 1999.

Mochebelele, the former principal secretary in the Ministry of Water, Energy and Mining in Lesotho, was seconded to supervise feasibility studies for the Lesotho Highlands Water Project - the largest infrastructure investment on the continent, which by its scheduled completion in 2020 would have cost more than R46 billion.

In 1998 the project accounted for 13.6% of Lesotho's GDP. Royalties from the sale of water and project-related customs dues make up 27.8% of all government revenue.

Mochebelele, in his current role at Nepad represents the continent at many international forums aimed at forging investment partnerships in sustainable energy and water projects with the West.

He has not yet been charged by the Lesotho authorities.

"All I know is what someone told me when they saw my name on the internet over this," said Mochebelele, responding to the allegations yesterday. "I'm just surprised by this, because no one has contacted me,"

Raymond Stock, representing Lahmeyer International GmbH, the company alleged to have made the payments to Mochebelele, appeared briefly in a Lesotho court last Thursday - which is, ironically, world anti-corruption day.

It is the second time the company has been in court over alleged bribery in relation to the Lesotho Water Highlands project.

In the early 1990s the project CEO, Masupha Ephraim Sole, was convicted of corruption and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. In that series of prosecutions, Lahmeyer was found guilty of bribery and fined R10 million.

Other firms convicted of bribing Sole were Canadian firm Acres International and French engineers Spie Batignolles.

The government of Lesotho has come down hard on multinational companies that paid bribes involving the Lesotho Highlands Water Project - one of the biggest dam projects in the world, with contracts estimated at \$8 billion (R46.7 billion).