

The 5th South Asia Research Workshop

May 3-5, 2010

Thimphu, Bhutan

Organized by

South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies,
India
&
Royal Society for Protection of Nature, Bhutan

Workshop Theme Globalization of governance: implications for water management in South Asia

Recent decades have seen several shifts in the relative roles of nation states vis a vis the international political and economic order. The rising role and significance of multilateral institutions, the rise of transnational corporations and Non Government Organizations have all served to challenge the sovereignty of nation states. At many levels, these trends have been interpreted as eroding the policy space and room to maneuver for governments in several areas of public policy formulation. The WEHAB agenda and the urge to accomplish the MDGs have led to the creation of new partnerships across the globe involving a wide range of different actors¹. Increasingly, the gap between government and governance has tended to widen; actors other than the state have taken on the role that was hitherto performed by it. The spread of democracy across the globe on the one hand and the growth of private enterprise on the other both pose new challenges for governance processes.

In the water sector the global environmental crisis, growing poverty in urban and rural areas, and continued gender inequalities all point to the need for a different governance approach to water use and management. As a result in recent years, water (and other natural resources) management has been undergoing major paradigm shifts due to these processes. Until quite recently, management was seen as the exclusive domain of technical experts working under the

¹ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed for the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) five key areas for particular focus - Water, Energy, Health, Agriculture and Biodiversity (WEHAB) (sourced at http://esl.jrc.it/dc/wehab/WEHAB_Indicators.htm)

auspices of the state. At the moment however, participatory management and stakeholder involvement have gained increasing importance. Furthermore, new management practices that involve multiple stakeholders are being adopted. The notion of government as the only decision-making authority has been replaced by multi-scale, polycentric governance, which recognizes a large number of stakeholders in different institutional settings to contribute to the management of a resource. Thus, collaborative governance is considered to be more appropriate for integrated and adaptive management regimes needed to cope with the complexity of social-ecological systems.

All these developments and challenges has led the academicians and practitioners to increasingly express concern over the inadequacy of current measures of universal economic performance, in particular those based on GDP figures. The concern is about the relevance of these indicators as measures of societal and human well-being and equity as well as measures of economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Current well-being has to do with both economic resources, such as income, and with non-economic aspects of peoples' life - what they do and what they can do, how they feel, and the natural environment they live in. Whether these levels of well-being can be sustained over time depends on whether stocks of capital that matter for our lives (natural, physical, human, social) are passed on to future generations². The big question is – does south Asia contribute to this debate through indigenous approaches or does it simply follow the concepts as talked about at the global level? Bhutan stands out here with its concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) which is regarded as a uniquely Bhutanese approach to measuring well-being and development as against the global perceptions of the subject.

In this context, this conference will seek to focus on the implications of these trends for water management in South Asia. How are the above described trends changing water management practices, ownership and access? How are water management policies being reformulated? What role have international and multilateral institutions played in influencing the direction and content of water sector reform processes? What room to maneuver do governments has vis -a vis the international political and economic order in the management of reform processes? How is the growth of private enterprise influencing access to water? And finally, what are the implications of these trends for human and societal well-being?

The conference invites papers exploring these and related issues.

Papers would fall in the following sub-themes.

I. Privatization of water services: Reforming the ‘reform’ agenda

The water service delivery is typically supply-driven in south Asia. The public agency delivering the service in most cases is far removed from the users and does not have the mandate or the incentive to be responsive to their needs. Commercial viability is not a concern and expenditure is biased towards new capital works rather than Operations and Maintenance. This results in lack of accountability, poor quality of service, poor returns on public expenditure and investment. It also leads to the issue that the existing delivery model is not sustainable and poorer urban residents are the biggest sufferers. A typical reform effort as recommended by MFIs

² Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress to be downloaded at <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>

is characterized by institutional reforms in securing downward accountability, water tariff reform and the role of state agencies as a regulator and not the service provider. Eventually the buck stops at privatization of water as a central agenda for reform. Does privatization bring in better services and do these reforms benefit the poor? What are the pro-poor objectives for reform?

2. Human wellbeing, Gender equity and IWRM – new and emerging challenges

Human well-being and equity - gender equity - are new and interrelated challenges for the water managers that have emerged in response to failures of the past. The scope of the new challenges is aptly reflected in the Global Water Partnership's definition of IWRM and call for managers to “*maximise the economic and social welfare of water users in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems*”.. While progress has been made in addressing gaps in water management and poverty reduction, human well-being and gender equity, the policy links between these require greater attention. The gender concepts of power inequality and the importance of transformation to ensure that women achieve positive and lasting changes in status are largely absent. Approaches to address these concerns require cohesion among the different institutions, policy, and regulatory frameworks and deliberate measures. This will mean a shift in power, and implications for institutional hierarchies/hegemonies and social relations. How are gender and/or human well-being taken into account in water policies and practice? Have women’s role in decision making and their equitable access and control over natural resources increased with their inclusion in local level WUAs? Is increasing women’s capacity and participation in community based programmes, and making them direct beneficiaries of poverty reduction programmes enough to increase human well-being and gender equity?

3. Urbanization and Water: A conundrum and a source of conflict

Urbanization is likely to be a defining process and characteristic of South Asia in the years to come and the process is already posing a serious challenge in sustaining water resources in the region. Very often, rural areas adjoining the cities serve as receptacles of urban waste, while providing the much needed land and water resources that sustain urban expansion. City after city in South Asia is exploiting the water resources of the rural hinterlands in its vicinity leading to conflicting situations and claims over the right to this resource. Increasingly, drinking water sources in the cities are drying up and water is brought from far distances to quench the thirst of ever increasing urban population. The question is – what are the alternatives and whether it is feasible in the context of south Asian politics? Is this an inevitable trend? How are current patterns of urbanization affecting water flows between urban and rural areas? What does this mean for the livelihoods of those who depend on water resources? Whose interests do current patterns of resource use protect? Of what public policies at a macro level are these trends a result?

4. Multilateral institutions and NGOs: changing configurations around the state in water resource management

The failure of the conventional approach where management of water resources was the exclusive domain of the state led by technical experts has led to a major policy shifts in recent decades. Water resources management in South Asia now increasingly sees the state to act as facilitator than merely a service provider. Added to this is the participatory processes adopted for

effective and efficient management of water resources adhering to the principles of equity and justice. Multilateral institutions and NGOs have become important actors in this emerging paradigm shift. However, this has often led to debates on state sovereignty on the one hand and greater multilateral institutions and NGO accountability on the other. How has donor funded reform programmes fared in the region? How has the state dealt with reform conditionalities? What role are NGOs playing in improving State's accountability? This section will deliberate on these issues in the broader framework of politics of water.

Important Dates

Last date for receipt of Abstracts – December 31, 2009 at 5:00 hours IST

Date of intimation for acceptance of Abstracts- January 15, 2010

Last date for receipt of full length paper – February 15, 2010

Date of intimation for selection of paper – March 7, 2010

Financial Support

The authors of the selected papers shall be awarded financial support to cover travel cost, accommodation and modest per diem. Total of 20 papers (excluding those by SAWA Fellows), based on author's original work, are expected to be presented in the conference.

Workshop coordinator

Dr. Chanda Gurung Goodrich
Senior Fellow – Research
SaciWATERS, South Asia Consortium for
Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies
Plot No.125 & 126, S.P. Colony,
Trimulgherry, Secunderabad - 500 015,
India
Ph : +91 40 27990139, 65762865
Telefax: +91 40 27796721
Email: chanda@saciwaters.org
Website: www.saciwaters.org

Workshop Co-coordinators

Ms. Lhamtshok Tshering
Programme Coordinator
Royal Society for Protection of Nature
Post Box 325, Drimen Lam
Thimphu, Bhutan
Telephone: +975 2 322056 / 326130
Fax: +975 2 323189
Email: tlhamtshok@rspnbhutan.org
Website: www.rspnbhutan.org

Ms. Jayati Chourey
Research Associate, **SaciWATERS**
Email: jayati@saciwaters.org

Abstracts\papers can be submitted electronically to
Dr. Chanda Gurung Goodrich at chanda@saciwaters.org

SaciWATERS



SaciWATERS

