

HOW BETTER GOVERNANCE AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION COULD REDUCE WATER INSECURITIES IN SHARED RIVER BASINS

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INTRODUCTION

Good water management in transboundary river basins depends not only on improving government policies and measures and enacting bilateral and multilateral inter-government basin-specific agreements and soft law joint arrangements. Equally important is the frequent involvement of multiple stakeholders in reducing water-related insecurities. Finding mechanisms to consolidate participation and partnerships of stakeholders is an important prerequisite for effective implementation of government arrangements and institutional regimes to protect rivers which cross national borders. Their role is also important at the stage of river basin regime formation. This presentation critically explores the opportunities and challenges involved in reducing water insecurities through expanding stakeholder participation and partnerships in transboundary water management in a number of selected shared river basins in Asia and in Europe. From a variety of water-related risks we focus mainly on those which are associated with water quality, i.e. water pollution, and water quantity, i.e. floods and water shortages. Our approach presupposes that institutional capacity building, strengthening coordination between government institutions (vertical and horizontal) and consolidating partnerships and participation of public, private and civil society actors is among effective tools for water management within shared river basins. We compare and aggregate major findings of the ongoing and recent international research initiatives, including the ‘Mekong Program on Water, Environment and Resilience, M-Power’, two projects supported by the Asia-Pacific Network (APN), i.e. “Reducing water insecurity through stakeholder participation in river basin management in the Asia-Pacific” and ‘Institutional capacity in natural disaster risk reduction in Asia’, and the European Commission concerted action ‘Cooperation along a Big River, CABRI-Volga’. This presentation draws on lessons and experiences of stakeholder involvement and coordination in water management in a number of selected river basins in Asia, including the Mekong, the Amur and Syr-Darya, and in Europe, including the Volga delta and the Scheldt estuary.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT MATTERS

During the recent decade there is worldwide debate on *how* to enhance the water basin management in a transborder context, and *how* to increase effectiveness of specific river basin accords which establish bilateral or multilateral regimes governing the protection of rivers which cross national borders¹. This

¹ According to the recent survey, the number of international rivers in Europe and in Asia account for 69 and 57, while the percentage of land area in international river basins comprise accordingly 54 and 39 percent. *See*, Ken Conca. *Governing Water*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, London, 2006, p. 94.

debate involves both researchers and practitioners, and significant attention is paid to enhancing the design and implementation of transborder inter-government agreements and soft law arrangements. One of the messages is that a great deal of water related problems, conflicts between water users, controversies between upstream and downstream states, or regions of a shared river basin within the same country are rooted in failures to establish good water basin governance and in poor coordination of efforts both *within* and *across* state borders. Poor stakeholder involvement is also among the reasons for currently fragmented cooperation within shared river basins.

Our research findings indicate that along with government cooperation efforts towards better watershed management there is a variety of mechanisms to pursue common goals of river protection and rehabilitation. *Participation* of stakeholders, *coordination* and *partnerships* among various actor groups becomes a *powerful tool* in good water governance. On the basis of our case-studies in selected river basins in Asia and in Europe we draw lessons and illustrate that good water governance presupposes combination of policies and measures undertaken not only by the governments and regional authorities, but by each of the multiple stakeholders within a river basin.

Finding mechanisms and tools to consolidate involvement and partnerships of stakeholders is an important prerequisite for effective *implementation* of interstate arrangements. A variety of stakeholders include water users, actors concerned with maintaining environment quality or ecosystem services, those involved in floods risk reduction as well as other groups potentially affected by water management interventions. Their inputs are needed to deliberate, to discuss and sometimes negotiate alternative land- and water-use plans, allocation policies, and infrastructure projects in a shared river basin. Their every-day participation and collaboration is often required to effectively implement water management policies. Forging participation and partnerships among state agencies, non-government organisations and private sector has been touted as an important instrument for reducing water-related insecurities within transborder context. This can help reduce conflict and lead to pro-active approaches to water-related risk reduction. But opportunities for meaningful participation can be restricted by capacities, conflicts, knowledge and expectations of benefits from getting engaged.

Our studies indicate that active stakeholder involvement also matters at the *early stages* of international *regime formation* for protection of shared watercourses. For example, their participation appears to be important for concluding the Amur river basin agreement between Russia and China because it consolidates the basis for its formation and implementation. Today, joint efforts of stakeholders are underway (scientific community, regional administrations, monitoring services and local public) to develop the Amur basin hydrological monitoring network which is a crucial element for the transborder regime. In 2007, special bilateral Amur monitoring programme has been adopted. Recently, the Amur Information Center had been established in Habarovsk by WWF and the regional water basin administration which is a new trend in Russia in development of public-government partnerships. We also believe that stakeholder groups might be important *drivers* in shared river basin regime formation. For example, business (energy producers and water services providers) might contribute with an impetus towards cooperation in solving problems in such transborder river basin of the Central Asia as the Syr-Daria. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in dismantling of the former economic integration and tight coordination of hydrological and irrigation infrastructure in the Syr-Daria basin: the lack since 1992 of success in cooperation between Kazakhstan, Kirgystan and Uzbekistan in hydrologically interdependent regions result in severe dispute on inter-seasonal water supply for hydro-energy production upstream (Kirgystan) and for agriculture irrigation downstream (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan) within the Syr-Daria basin.

STAKEHOLDER ROLES

One of the messages from our comparative studies across shared river basins in Asia and in Europe suggests that while assessing possible options in water management it is helpful to ‘deeper’ desegregate policies and measures into those undertaken by various stakeholder groups. From a wide range of multiple stakeholders within shared river basins we selected the five major stakeholder groups that have an *interest* and *capacity* to participate in decision-making and to take real actions to reduce water-related insecurities. The following groups had been studied:

- Government organs (central-regional-local and transborder)

- Business
- Scientific community
- Non-government and community-based organizations
- Households

We critically explore and compare the roles of particular stakeholder groups within selected river basins. For example, the Mekong basin provides interesting evidence about stakeholder involvement in responses to water-related risks. As more emphasis of the Mekong Programme (Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam) is recently given to IWRM application at basin scale, its essential part focuses on strengthening local capacities, roles and involvement of multiple stakeholders. Particularly important it is for implementation of its subprogrammes on floods, fisheries, environment conservation, on rational use of water in agriculture. For instance, along with government administrations, the wider participation of local communities, water services providers, agricultural locales is being secured in its new strategy “More Crop per Drop” aimed at enhancing water management capacities, efficiency of water use in agriculture and improvement of existing irrigation systems in the basin (about 85% of Mekong basin population is involved in agriculture). Community-based approach during seasonal floods is also gaining wider joint support in the Mekong basin.

Uncertain and changing insecurities and risks in the context of global and regional environmental change underline the importance of strengthening adaptive capacities of stakeholder groups and their joint response efforts in a transborder context. In particular we focus on the roles, beliefs and interests of different stakeholder groups, and how this, and existing institutional settings and policy tools applied, affect public participation and deliberation in water management in shared river basins. First, we assess a variety of instruments and practices applied by stakeholder groups in the face of risks within a river basin. Second, we explore the existing partnerships and coordination among stakeholders, as well as conflicts. Finally, we identify possibilities and constraints for exchange of good practices within transborder river basins. We conclude that meaningful participation by multiple stakeholders requires careful attention to the processes by which they act together, how credibility and accountability of a process is maintained, and how these platforms inform or otherwise relate to ‘shared’ decision-making.

INTERNATIONAL – DOMESTIC LINKAGES

Stakeholder groups are the key actors performing the every-day practices to counteract water-related insecurities within shared river basins. This refers both to their efforts *within* and *across* national borders. Stakeholders are the major drivers in routine *domestic implementation* of interstate accords once they are signed, government officials return back home and domesticating of the accords initiates. The roles of stakeholders in meeting, or violating the norms and behavioural prescriptions of intergovernment agreements are becoming crucial. However, it often happens, that although bilateral and multilateral river-specific agreements are signed, respective institutional frameworks are established and the process of norm diffusion for water basin management starts, the performance of institutions and implementation of policies and measures is not always effective. Among a variety of reasons for failures and loopholes in institutional system is that it often does not provide for and stimulate active stakeholder participation and coordination in preventing, or adapting to water-related insecurities. But, involvement of each of them and partnerships between them is one of the keys for institutional successes within and across state borders.

The practices in the Mekong basin show, that the major issue in establishing partnerships in shared basins is not only how tightly the stakeholder actions are coordinated in a transborder context. Equally important is how and to what extent domestic stakeholders in each country of the basin the basin are taking actions in response to decisions of the national implementing authorities, i.e. the Mekong national committees of the four country-members of the Mekong River Commission

Within this section we explore the idea that stakeholder participation is equally important for domestic implementation and enacting in every-day practices of the *soft law* and less formal agreements such as joint declarations or memoranda of intent, or cooperative action plans and programmes established within specific river basins. Stakeholder groups are the major actors in domestic implementing such principles as consultations, information exchange, conflict resolution between water users and use of traditional

knowledge. We also compare the implementation of particular standard norms that are in play across different shared river basins.

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that meaningful participation by multiple stakeholders is a prerequisite for effective implementation of policies and measures to reduce water-related insecurities in shared river basins, and also for the basin regime formation. It requires careful attention to the processes by which stakeholders act together, how credibility and accountability is maintained, and how these platforms inform or otherwise relate to decision-making. Their collaboration and commitment is often required to effectively implement water management policies within an entire shared river basin. Local public participation in reducing water-related insecurities to livelihoods located in shared river basins is gaining its importance both in Asia and in Europe; our studies show that local dimension is among the most sensitive within human security issues, while the local public commitment in many river basins is still a weak, but crucial element in reducing exposure to water-related risks. Stakeholder river basin partnerships, both domestic and international, can help reduce conflict and lead to pro-active approaches to water management. Twinning initiatives and exchange of lessons learned between river basins might be quite effective tool.

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