



Center for Development Research
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Call for Papers

WATER POLICY DYNAMICS IN STATE-CENTRIC REGIMES

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), defined by the Global Water Partnership as “a process which promotes the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems,” (GWP TAC 2000) is a concept that has gained international attention since water experts and advocates worldwide convened and agreed upon the Dublin Principles in preparation for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The Dublin Principles promote awareness-raising among policy makers and the general public, taking decisions at the lowest appropriate level, full public consultation and involvement of users in planning and implementation of projects, empowering women to participate in water resources programs in self-defined ways, and recognizing the basic right of human beings to have affordable access to clean water and sanitation. The concept of IWRM that came forward from these principles has been understood as having normative and strategic value for providing a framework to achieve sustainable resource management, which in turn can be operationalized through different types of approaches. Nonetheless, at the center of IWRM's strongly normative global discourse is an emphasis upon distinctly society-centric assumptions of how governance is carried out within a nation-state (Mollinga 2008).

Society-centric theories of the state rely on a number of assumptions: liberal individual-rights and the protection of those rights; the competition of individuals maximizing their self-interest as a driving economic and social force; and the neutral role of the state in regulating the free market to coordinate the allocation of resources, and in arbitrating between competing forces in society to achieve the common good. Given these assumptions concerning the relationship between government and society, any given policy can be traced back to demands placed upon the government by competing interest groups within the national political system – the source of authority for policy formulation inherently comes from within society.

The society-centric assumptions upon which IWRM policies tend to be based can serve as a methodological challenge within states where there is an empirical reality of state-centric processes. In such polities, the state has some level of autonomy from social and economic forces, and it is assumed to not be neutral in its relationships with organized interests. As such, any given policy can be traced to the active role of government officials seeking to maximize their individual economic welfare and power or to the constraining role of the state's organizational structure. State-centric theories of the state see the state as an independent variable in explaining political and social events.

Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, there has been a push for all countries to adopt policies promoting IWRM. Authoritarian countries are obviously state-centric in their approach. A number of new democracies that have arisen since the end of the Cold War to satisfy domestic and donor pressure have established political hybrids, which Ottoway (2003) calls semi-authoritarian states. These regimes have deliberately combined the rhetoric of liberal democracy while allowing for little real political competition for power. Bell et al (1995) also discuss the phenomenon of Asian democratization as being "illiberal" in that these countries have promoted a non-neutral understanding of the state, with a technocracy managing the developing state as a corporate enterprise, while maintaining control over public space and civil society. Zakaria (1997, 2003) built upon this discussion, broadening its application outside of the Asian context by differentiating constitutional liberty (the protection of individual rights through a legal system that cannot be arbitrarily manipulated by government) from democracy (open, free, and fair elections). Many new democracies, he points out, have promoted the latter without developing the former, defining them as "illiberal democracies."

A number of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian/illiberal-democratic nations have adopted institutional reforms within their water resources sectors. Such countries as China, Cuba, Egypt, Kyrgistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Uganda have been recognized for instituting national policies, strategies, and laws for water resources development and management, but are nonetheless resistant to fully embracing the society-centric aspects of IWRM reforms.

In this Call for Papers, we are seeking to make sense of processes involved in authoritarian regimes with respect to water reforms, drawing from a broad set of cases. As such, we seek not to solve the issue, but rather to open up discussion and explore findings to-date for further analytic development. We are interested in historically and geographically contextualized case studies employing the following types of analysis:

- Actor-oriented analyses (Long and Van der Ploeg 1994) exploring the processes of state-centric regimes in adopting and/or implementing water (including IWRM) policies. This can involve an analysis of bureaucracy or leadership to

understand how policy ideas are distilled and how decisions are made in a closed policy regime, bringing light to the policy process and structure-agency issues embedded in decision-making. Such an account of how the normative ideas of IWRM arrive, translate, and are carried out in the technocratic engineering-oriented water bureaucracies of closed regimes greatly informs the discussion.

- Given that the state is not a distinctive actor nor an entity in itself, but rather can be considered to be an ideological project (Abrams 1988), accounting for the resources, strategies, and limitations of non-state actors actively interested in promoting society-centric water policy processes (including IWRM), and their respective experiences and responses to the state-centric structures of governance aids in understanding the dynamics of the relationship between state and society in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes.

In discussing a set of such cases and the questions they present, we would like embark on developing a new vocabulary as well as an innovative set of ideas concerning how the analysis of water policy dynamics can be undertaken in state-centric water policy regimes, as frameworks incorporating society-centric assumptions seem to have clear limits.

The timeline for this Call for Papers is as follows:

Timeline

January 20, 2009: Deadline for submission of abstracts of papers. Abstracts should be submitted to Anjali Bhat at abhat@uni-bonn.de.

February 1, 2009: Selected authors invited to submit papers

March 24-25, 2009: Workshop on Water Policy, IWRM and Authoritarian Regimes

For enquiries or further details, please contact the Workshop organizers.

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