



ICID Water Governance: emerging theory and practice.  
Friday 19th October 2007 Institute of Civil Engineers, London

Brief Summary

Most of the workshop was taken up with a range of presentations discussing: the concept of water governance with reference to conceptual models, methods and approaches for improving water governance and the value of various processes (such as participation techniques or the granting of water rights). The points below summarise discussion following the presentations.

- Models of water governance
  - o The presentations proposed practical frameworks for both analysing and improving water governance.
  - o Reference was made to the use of decentralised models, the value of a common vision, recognition that water governance is essentially a political process
  - o Case studies highlighted issues of perspective, power, drivers and incentives and other factors that influence decision making and other governance processes
  - o There was a call to evaluate the application of models through independent assessment and to learn from experience
- Definitions of water governance
  - o Water governance is a fluid concept and appears to be specific to the context
  - o Governance has been linked to issues of corruption by DFID (but generally not by this workshop)
  - o Someone observed that principles of accountability and transparency (or corruption) however are often aligned to the concept of water governance, which can otherwise be abstract
  - o Another felt that water governance in practice is predicated on processes such as participation.
  - o There was general agreement that water governance has to deal with *nicked problems* (i.e. problems that can never be solved completely and that tend to be messy and affected by complex interdependencies)
- Participation
  - o Experience of 'participation fatigue' by farmers and that consultation exercises may be perceived as 'tokenism' on the part of policy-makers in the United Kingdom
  - o Participation should be linked to a goal and have a purpose.
  - o People may only participate if they have a problem with current governance
- The potential of water rights
  - o Discussion of the links between water rights and governance system prompted observation that water rights sit alongside other processes to manage and allocate water, but that water rights perhaps were a defining issue by which governance should be gauged.
- Water security is seen as a growing issue and this may prompt decisions about how to allocate water between different sectors. It was suggested that the 'hydro-hegemony' conceptualisation presented by Mark Zeitoun may be prove insightful when addressing the question of water allocation. Although Mark Zeitoun's presentation focused on governance issues at the basin and international levels, it was suggested the power – differential perspective could be engaged with at other levels such as organisations, communities and irrigation systems.
- Finally, Peter Lee, International President of the ICID, suggested that the presentations could contribute to 'Theme 4: Governance and Management' of the World Water Forum in Istanbul in 2009.

*(With thanks to Shona Russell and Charles Batchelor for acting as note-takers and discussants)*