Workshop 2b (synthesis): linking drainage basin management to local action plans and national security – theory and practice in eastern European countries

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Abstract Efforts to link and balance national water policies, local water action and national security issues are discussed. There needs to be greater clarity of water roles, rights and responsibilities among national stakeholders as well as between states. In some cases, insufficient attention has been paid to local concerns and, in balancing national and local actions, it is necessary to address decentralization in the context of a transboundary state. There is a strong need for enhanced stakeholder participation in the formulation and implementation of national and local water management plans.

Keywords Local and national water policies; river basin management; stakeholder participation; transboundary water resources

Introduction

The workshop focused on efforts to link and balance national water policies, local water action and national security issues in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Water use and management in these regions are often characterized by intensive and inefficient use by agriculture and industry, general neglect of ecological concern, insufficient provision of water supply and sanitation to households and insufficient levels of wastewater and effluent treatment.

A recurring theme throughout the workshop was the need to take into account differing local and national cultural, social, economic, political and administration conditions. It became apparent during the discussions that different solutions apply, dependent upon the national and local context. A common theme was also that water resources issues cannot be seen in isolation from the rest of society and its sustainable development. Water allocation and management decisions and water reform have to be considered in the broader context of other social, economic and political reforms. It was suggested that the real water challenge is about more effective governance and how to create an enabling environment for the implementation of IWRM and river basin management. Some of the issues that are of importance to address are:

- Instability in government structure leading to confusion about the rule of the game.
- Rivalry between various governmental water agencies leading to inequity and inefficiency in water distribution.
- Rent-seeking behavior among government officials.
- Lack of appropriate mechanisms for mediating water disputes at regional, national and local levels along with limited river basin cooperation.
- Poor implementation of water legislation and lack of effective multi-stakeholder participation.

In general there needs to be a greater clarity of water roles, rights and responsibilities.
among national stakeholders as well as between states. It was also suggested that a river basin management approach is needed that takes into account land-based activities (various economic and pollution activities) as well as marine and coastal issues, such as eutrophication and ecology.

A great deal of the discussion was devoted to “shared waters” in the region as well as at the intra-state level, such as the roles and responsibilities at federal and district level. Some of the discussed water basins included the Dnipro, Volga, Amy Darya and Danube. Many reasons were discussed regarding water disputes. Some of the water disputes are related to water pollution by upstream countries, the sharing of benefits and costs, poor drinking water and allocation between water uses (urban-rural uses). It was noted that transboundary water issues among many Central Asian countries is particularly challenging due to the historical context of being former Soviet Union States.

A general conclusion was that transboundary water issues are drawing more attention to: foreign policy and national security issues; international law and agreements; and interstate disputes. It was felt that little attention has been paid to local concerns and a general conclusion was that in balancing national and local actions it is necessary to address decentralization in the context of transboundary water.

Strong water supply oriented and technical approaches are still prevailing in many countries. However, some countries have started to re-think their water management paradigm and are now working towards demand side management approaches and increasingly addressing water governance issues as critical for sustainable water use. It was recognized that various water management principles based on IWRM and river basin management among riparians should be harmonized to a much greater extent.

There is a strong need for enhanced stakeholder participation in the formulation and implementation of national and local water management plans. Currently there is an increasing recognition of the need to delegate water resources management issues to the lowest appropriate level (subsidiarity principle) and to promote public-private partnerships as a means to make more efficient and productive use of water resources. It was suggested that the organization of, for example, Public Advisory Councils and Water Users’ Association (WUA), could be one way of securing enhanced stakeholder participation.

Various groups, such as NGOs, farmers’ organisations, local authorities, scientific and technological communities, business and industry, trade unions, indigenous people and women, have increasingly become an integral part of sustainable development and management of water resources at regional, national and local levels. The effective roles and achievements of various groups have so far varied. For example, many NGOs have been more successful in building community awareness and local capacity than in providing technical support for water assessments, water supply and sanitation. Attempts to encourage the transfer of operation and maintenance to WUAs have had mixed results, as the generally low economic returns on irrigated agriculture and uncertain land tenure provide little incentive for farmers to make long-term capital investments.

One way to promote improved public participation is through enhanced political and public awareness of IWRM and river basin management. Other areas that were stressed as critical for improved water management included capacity building, improved communication and coordination and partnerships between government agencies and other stakeholders. Community organisations play a crucial role as water managers, more often at the local scale. As other organisations gradually take greater responsibility for the direct management of water resources governments will have to strengthen their role as natural resource and service regulators.