

What's missing in debates of the water SDGs and water management policies

Professor Lyla Mehta
Institute of Development Studies, UK &
Noragric, Norway

UCL Grand Challenges Symposium
Water SDGs and Future Water Management
November 2016

Outline

- The politics of scarcity
- Inequality in access to water as biggest crime of 21st century
- What's missing in the SDGs
- Water management and the politics of integration (IWRM and beyond)
- Conclusions



Are we running out?
What is scarcity?

Availability, scarcity, competing uses

Regions	2010	2050
North America	13 287	10 171
Latin America and Caribbean	21 450	16 957
South Asia	1 325	910
East Asia and Pacific	4 279	4 129
Europe and Central Asia	7 756	7 572
Middle East and North Africa	778	506
Sub-Saharan Africa	5 492	2 645
Developed Countries	7 510	6 099
Developing Countries	5 353	3 956
<i>World</i>	5 675	4 250



Inequality in access

- Inequality in access to water is a global outrage
- No dearth of ideas, meetings and policies on water and water management
- But often fail to address sustainability and the interests of poorer and marginalised people
- Structural violence and invisible power have ended up naturalising water inequalities
- These seriously undermine human wellbeing, health, education and life chances of poor women and men

Who is shaping the debate?

- Dominant debates framed by key global players (WWC; World Bank; GWP; CGIAR system)
- Universalised discourses; technocentric; aggregate numbers (e.g. scarcity)
- Primacy of global North definitions and trends (e.g. improved ; IWRM/ Nexus etc.)
- Top down and disconnected
- Contentious politics and struggles over access and meaning

From MDGs to SDGs

- MDGs flawed due to lack of attention to universality, gender equality and sustainability
- Low hanging fruit and lack of attention to peri urban issues, informality
- SDGs seek universality and equitable access
- Address gender and vulnerability and water quality
- Water scarcity, IWRM, equitable sanitation

Problems with SDGs

- Huge number of indicators and possible problems with monitoring and tracking
- SDG industry?
- Lack of mechanisms of accountability
- Diverse interpretations (e.g. improved access;
- Lack of commitments to human rights
- Lack of attention to power imbalances that create water crises

The quest for integration

- Long history of integration in the water sector
- Since Dublin 1992, IWRM as 'panacea' to address water management crisis
- Flagship project of GWP and others
- Rapidly spread from temperate regions to the global south
- Quasi IWRM industry and key in water reform processes
- BUT: experiences mixed especially in Africa (due to complexity of basins; overlapping and competing systems)
- 'Flows and Practices' – Water Alternatives 9:3

The Case of South Africa

- Apartheid legacy of skewed land/water access
- Political transition in '94: space for reform
- Home grown with outside experts - new government emphasized integration as policy paradigm
- IWRM inspired CMAs
- Despite most progressive legislation : only two functioning CMAs..
- Paralysis due to costly, bureaucratic processes; problems with decentralisation, lack of integration/ overlapping jurisdictions; national government outsourcing to local and problems with provincial level/ regional offices etc.
- Stickiness of inequality and not enough radical reallocation of resources ; domination of white commercial farmers
- Lack of coordination between land and water processes
- Problems with capacity and participation

Politics of integration

- Integration as a political process and politics around trade offs -
- Integration as buzzword
- Africa has clearly been a laboratory for IWRM. In focus on management, access to water has not been enlarged. Several alternatives squashed
- Contradictory outcomes of IWRM-inspired reforms. In the name of participation and decentralization, more centralized state management has emerged and more power vested to large users of water

The introduction of water pricing and permits has allowed powerful and wealthy water users take advantage of water payments to secure water rights at the expense of unregistered smallholder users who depend on primary water for their livelihoods.

Poor capacity to implement reform and for new institutions to work and talk to each other; silos still exist; lack of integration of land and water

Despite focus on equitable allocation, marginalized groups not benefitted.

The Case of the Nexus

- Importance of integrating water/ energy/ food/ climate
- Origins of the nexus
- Politics of knowledge around the nexus
- Whose security risks are we concerned about?
And how manage trade offs and local level conflicts?
- Distraction from land and water grabs?
- Governance of water/ land/ food shared by historical and cultural legacies



Conclusions

Structural violence & power imbalances perpetuate inequality in water sector

Failure of integration approaches in water management to address access and inequality

Unless these imbalances are addressed SDGs and future water policies will not deliver and fail