

BRAZIL

BUILDING INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RIO GRANDE DO SUL

The 1988 Federal Constitution made Brazil one of the most decentralised countries in the world. While this is important in bringing financial and political authority to the local level, it also raises issues of political and administrative fragmentation and the need to build relationships between the three levels of government (municipal, state and national), in this case for effective Environmental Planning and Management (EPM).



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Brazil has a National Environmental System (SISNAMA) made up of bodies at national, state and municipal levels, which is responsible for EPM. The main instrument applied by SISNAMA has been a system of environmental licensing: that is, the process of evaluation and authorisation of any activity (from policy to project) that has potential impact on the environment. However, this system has operated only at project level and SISNAMA's overall effective-

ness in EPM has been limited by a lack of capacity and unclear roles and responsibilities. Integrated EPM in Brazil also has proved difficult since water management and EPM have distinct institutional arrangements. Water management is the responsibility of the National System for Water Resources and it is not clear how the two systems integrate for sustainable development.

The State of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) is the southernmost State in Brazil and one of the most developed in terms of per capita income and social indicators. It has a total population of 9,810,000 inhabitants (80% urban). RS State government has responded to the problems described with a new institutional framework, in an effort to clarify institutional roles and build capacity for EPM at the same time as integrating it with water management. This framework emphasises the importance of sub-national governments (state governments in Brazil) in shaping politics and policies Brazil's federal system. The RS integrated EPM strategy is based on the inte-

gration of the environmental and water systems and their instruments such as environmental licensing and watershed planning. The current main guidelines for the state environmental policy were defined in 2000 through a participatory process of eleven regional conferences.

The RS State EPM System (SISEPRA) was created in 1994. It is led by the State Environmental Council, which has decision-making powers, comprises a range of civil society organisations and is supported by the State Secretariat for the Environment which was created in 1999 as executive coordinating body.

SISEPRA is being restructured on the basis of a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of municipalities and state bodies, and this is being transformed into law by state legislative assembly and regulations. The agreement on roles is based on three guidelines: First, there should be cooperation and complementarity between State and Municipal actions for the solution of environmental problems. Second, the solution for local problems requires legal structures and capacity at the municipal level. Third, with the support from the state institutions, municipal-

ities must articulate their actions for the construction of regional collective strategies. The agreement thereby simultaneously avoids "localism" and centralisation. Within SISEPRA, state institutions assume a more strategic role of environmental evaluation and planning, undertaking technically complex environmental licensing and coordinating SISEPRA activities, while the municipalities are responsible for operating environmental licensing for activities of local impact and less technical complexity.

To support these responsibilities, a state-wide capacity building programme is being delivered, the largest of its kind in Brazil and reaching 497 municipalities. As a result of the programme there are already 30 municipalities operating environmental licensing of local impact activities (representing 37%

watershed planning, creating new possibilities for dialogue with the local Water Basin Management Committees (the local structures of the Water Resources Management System for deliberation on long term water uses, quality standards, investment and intervention needs). Simultaneously, the work allowed the Basin Committees to become involved in public debate through environmental licensing procedures, thus overcoming the limits of traditional public hearings.

The main obstacles encountered by the new system are the deep-rooted inequalities (economic and in terms of social capital) among regions and municipalities and the level of administrative fragmentation. These obstacles are not related exclusively to environmental matters or to the State of Rio

Grande do Sul. They relate to the broader Brazilian federal system and are connected to the lack of capacity of most municipalities (the majority with less than 5,000 inhabitants) to provide even the most traditional basic services (transport, housing, education, etc.). This creates a challenging context for the experience of structuring a

shared decentralised system for integrated EPM in Brazil.

The building of a decentralised and integrated EPM system in RS and the integrated river basin assessment are two pioneering experiences in Brazil, which are having national influence. The new model adopted by SISEPRA is bringing into focus the need to restructure SISNAMA. Simultaneously, the river basin assessment shows the importance of improving environmental licensing in the country if SISNAMA is to contribute more effectively to environmental protection and to a sustainable development strategy in the country that integrates water and EPM work.

Scaling up the practices adopted in Rio Grande do Sul is a major political task, however, which has involved dissemination of the practices at the national level, as well as involving increasing exchange with the other State Secretariats for the environment.

of state population); 8 regional consortia for solid waste management have been created and, despite the variety of operational conditions, 158 municipalities have an organised system for solid waste management (representing almost 60% of the total solid waste production in the state).

In addition, environmental issues are gaining increasing importance in the public agenda and in governance concerns at the municipal level, mobilising social actors and opening space for broader environmental strategies at the local level.

The integration between water and broader EPM has been operated through redefinition of roles and reallocation of resources within SISEPRA. The state environmental licensing body has produced the first strategic environmental assessment of a hydroelectric program in Brazil, evaluating its environmental and social impacts on the Rio Taquari-Antas watershed. Operating environmental licensing at this scale reinforced the integration of this traditional EPM with



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