

**2nd NARBO TRAINING WORKSHOP ON RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT
AND RIVER BASIN ORGANIZATION HELD ON 24-29 APRIL 2005 AT SRI
LANKA**

Mashiur Rahman, Bangladesh

LESSONS/NEW IDEAS FOUND:

The idea of River Basin Management is relatively new and the experience accumulated yet in different places/countries by practice is obviously small. “Correct” way of specifying river basin management is not possible. Countries vary, and they have different cultural, political and administrative traditions. Within countries the basins themselves vary, also some are trans-boundary. In this workshop an accumulation of concepts and experiences of different places have been presented in a delicate manner. Following are some of the issues and findings out of the studies of Mr. Madar Samad in five river basins in five different countries like, Fuyang basin (China), Singkark Basin (Indonesia), Upper Pampanga (Philippines), East Rapti (Nepal) and Deduru Oya basin (Sri Lanka):

- The study shown that there are situation prevails to develop river basin management. The development responds to the changing pattern of demand for water over time linked to population growth and economic development.
- A single or a unique model will not work in different places/countries. Here a country’s ability to adopt a new policy/management system is a great concern which corresponds to the over all state of economy, political system and norm, legal system, cultural background and its physical resource base. So a single best model is not possible. Institutional designs must be set up to adapt these changes.
- There is an urgent need to clearly defined water rights to protect poor and vulnerable groups with regard to the accessibility to the water.
- Existing water management agencies entrusted for traditional (agricultural, domestic, etc.) water management have to be effective enough to deal the services they are entrusted for.
- Traditional institutional arrangements which are time tested and adapted to local conditions and needs.
- To design effective mechanism for stakeholders consultations and ensure their participation in all level of water resources management such as policy, plan, implementation, operation and maintenance.

The study of advanced river basin management (Japan and Australia) suggests that formal “river basin management/organization” or creation of a large scale public bureaucracies are not required for managing water-scarce river basins. Arrangement like various kinds of committees, networks can often work effectively. But there

needs a legal framework, clearly defined water rights and a regulatory framework to make such arrangements work.

The success stories of Murray-Darling, Omonogawa and Brantas, suggests that the institutional development for a river basin management is a slow process taking decades and cannot be done overnight.

Although the basin management arrangement is in principle a win-win proposition, it appears that existing institutional constraints and lack of confidence often hinder development of such arrangements.

Tasks of river-basin management:

As per learned opinion of Dr. Charles L Abernethy that for river-basin management some of the tasks involve managing the water in the basin, some of them are to managing the basin itself and some of them involve managing the living things that inhabit or use the basin. An effective river basin management should include the following tasks:

A primary task is to get the statistics of the water resources of the basin in a condition that is suitable for modern management. Hydrological and water data should be given proper importance in terms of fund, administrative prominence and also in terms of an ambitious career.

Demand of water should be considered as an important data to the management to manage and balance the consumption and abstraction side also the quantity that returned to the nature.

In due course and time an appropriate system of licenses or permits for abstraction of water to be adopted. It is now a normal practice in rich or developed countries.

A land registration system to follow the steps below:

- Establish existing situation: basic map tools for land, quantify resources and existing patterns of uses.
- Establish a clear system of rights to use water. Ensure that rights to use water, when they have been approved and granted, are secured to motivate people to make investments in its use and its improvement.
- Set up much better arrangement for controlling the right to dispose of water.
- Each of the above steps will take many years to accomplish. After that, tradable or transferable rights may exist. The checklist of ten features of rights are: Quantity, Timing, Location, Quality, Conditionality, Duration, Disposal, Sources, Ownership and Transfer.

Organizational Characteristics:

As per the learned opinion of Dr. Charles L Abernethy that though there are many possible ways of forming river basin management are available, but it is not essential that the new organization should be made. Major thing is to develop appropriate level of involvement of the stakeholders has to be considered.

An important characteristics of a river basin organization is the relationship to new capital developments within the basin.

For all above activities legal framework will be required.

Finance for the river basin management activities is a critical issue. Cost of uses of water has to deal with people's emotion, religious feelings. That is why water is either free or of very low cost.

A RBO should be a regulatory body not a service providing agency. It has to treat other traditional (public) service provider as an extractor (water user) like others (private/NGOs) and should be subject to the same regulation or constraints like other individual, private/NGOs users.

Limitation:

Basin of the trans-boundary rivers was not covered in this workshop. Hope NARBO will do so in near future.

Lessons from different presentation study/research outputs and experiences:

It is difficult to accommodate the lessons learned from different presentation study/research outputs and experiences of different expert and professionals who have presented their deliberation very preciously. However, taking knowledge on traditional system of irrigation in Sri Lanka (cascade system), present development in river basin management by developing Mahaweli River Basin Authority and their activity, experience, problems and observations were very interesting.

Experience through field work in Maha Oya river basin in the middle reach was also very important. The problem due to sand mining facing there is totally different than my country. They have problem of river bed lowing where in my country problem is river bed rising. Organizational structures are some thing different but the social-political and management dynamics and complexity have some similarity.

Utilizing lessons learned in terms of river basin management in my own place:

Practicing river basin management has not started yet in Bangladesh in an effective manner. Drinking water supply service providers are taking costs from the tail users. But due to absence of an effective RBO those service providers need to pay for the resources they are extracting from the basin. Irrigation service providers have a program of taking water rates but due to socio-political reason and poor economic condition of the farmers collection is very low.

First we have to make an aware and consensus for forming RBO involving all the formal and informal stakeholders. The RBO should be quiet small, powerful and effective. At least in some area like drinking water, industrial use RBO will be able to succeed to perform its role. In case of agriculture subsidized rate may be provided through strong control. Again rates in urban and rural areas may vary appropriately.

RBO should also fix rates for misuse, industrial disposal which will vary depending on the degree of treatment made by the respective industry before dispose it up.