

Workshop on Global Water Governance and the UN System

13-15th October, 2010, Bonn, Germany

Organized by Claudia Pahl-Wostl, Joyeeta Gupta and Theo Toonen

Overall scope

The global dimension has gained increasing importance in water governance. Water problems have traditionally been considered to be local or regional problems. However, there are strong arguments to take the global dimension into account (Pahl-Wostl, et al, 2008; Alcamo et al, 2008)¹. The hydrological system is a global system and exchange processes occur at global level over relevant time periods (e.g. climate change impacts; other teleconnections for instance between deforestation and precipitation). Global environmental change (GEC) and socio-economic phenomena at the global level increasingly create situations in which the driving forces behind water related problems and conflicts lie outside the reach of local, national or basin oriented governance regimes (e.g. global trade impacts on water quantity and quality, climate change). Many local phenomena occur globally such as erosion, eutrophication, urbanisation, biodiversity loss, or the introduction of invasive species. The same is valid for many human health issues like the poor quality of drinking water supply and of sanitation in poor countries. Such local phenomena may imply alarming global trends.

Given these alarming developments one may question if current fora and processes of global water governance provide the necessary institutional framework to meet present and future challenges. In their analysis of the current state of global water governance Pahl-Wostl et al (2008) noted the diffuse and fragmented character of today's Global Water Governance with heterogeneous players without indications of emerging global leadership. The lack of strong motivation within UN agencies and states to push water management has been compensated by the rise of pluralistic bodies trying to deal with these issues. UN Water, the coordination platform for water related issues in the UN system, is thus far comprised of functional and nongovernmental agents of various water-related 'partners', not organisations representing governmental units, or the water governance system in and of itself.

Despite the scientific and political importance of the theme, work on global water governance is yet scarce. Furthermore there is little exchange between governance scholars working at the global level with those working at the basin and community levels. To improve this situation the Global Water System Project (GWSP)² has started to establish a community of scholars working on global and basin water governance issues by organizing a suite of activities related to the topic of global water governance:

- June 2006: Workshop "Governance and the Global Water System: Institutions, actors, scales of water governance facing the challenges of global change" which resulted in a special issue in the journal *Global Governance* 2008 on "Global Governance of Water: Trends, Processes and Ideas for the Future" edited by Pahl-Wostl, Gupta and Petry.
- 2009 - Book on "The Evolution of Law and Politics of Water" edited by Dellapenna and Gupta.
- October 2010: Workshop on "Global Water Governance and the UN System", in Bonn, Germany.
- December 2010: Session at GCI conference on "The Global Dimension of Change in River Basins" in Bonn, Germany.
- February 2011: Policy Workshop on "Global Water Governance and the UN System" at UNEP Nairobi, Kenya.
- June 2011 - Session at the European Science Foundation sponsored conference on "Water Governance facing the Challenge of Global Change"

The last two above mentioned workshops on "Global Water Governance and the UN System" are the next step in this suite of activities. The focus of these workshops will be on the role of the UN System in global water governance. The first workshop aims at an assessment of the state of the art in global water governance

¹ Alcamo, J., Vörösmarty, C., Naiman, R.J., Lettenmaier, D.P., and Pahl-Wostl, C., 2008, *A grand challenge for freshwater research: understanding the global water system.*, Environ. Res., Lett. 3, 010202.

Pahl-Wostl, C., Gupta, J. and Petry, D. 2008. Governance and the Global Water System: Towards a Theoretical Exploration, *Global Governance*, 14: 419-436.

² GWSP, www.gwsp.org - a joint project/network of the ESSP – WCRP, IGBP, IHDP and DIVERSITAS

studies and the identification of major knowledge and policy gaps. In particular the following questions will be addressed:

- What are the present and emerging challenges for global water governance?
- Is the current global water governance system capable of dealing with present and emerging challenges?
- Does UN Water as a body that coordinates UN water activities offer a sufficiently suitable forum for engaging in, discussing and taking decisions on water governance to meet the present and emerging governance challenges?
- What could and should be the role of the UN system in global water governance taking into account experiences regarding UN activities in global water governance and experiences regarding the role of the UN system in other areas of global environmental governance?

Agenda of the workshop:

Wednesday 13th of October

- 12 Lunch
- 13 Opening and introduction to the workshop
- 13.30 Short presentations of statement from participants and discussions

Thursday 14th of October

- Work in small groups on the themes addressed in the four guiding questions to identify policy messages and to draft outlines of interdisciplinary scholarly papers

Friday 15th of October

- Plenary to agree on policy recommendations, preparation of UN workshop, contributions to a special issue, contribution to GCI conference in December, next steps
- 14 Closing after lunch

Expected outcomes:

- Special issue in a peer reviewed journal
- Policy brief on the current state of global water governance and the role of the UN level as input to the policy focused workshop at UNEP

2nd policy focused workshop at UNEP, Nairobi (February - March 2011)

This workshop will bring together representatives from several UN agencies and water governance scholars to discuss the current role of the UN level in global water governance and in addressing pressing global water governance topics and to identify possible steps to strengthen this role.