

Water Policy – Water Politics

Social engineering and strategic action in water sector reform

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in Transformations- und Entwicklungsländern*

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Main messages

- More emphasis on the *politics* of water needed
- Mapping water politics: levels and issue-networks
- Two main issues in water sector reform:
 - Internalising ecology and human development
 - from state-centric to society-centric policy processes
- Research to be located in policy processes



Why emphasise *politics* ?

- Inherent political nature of water resources management not acknowledged widely
- Water control = politically contested resource use



Framework

- Levels
 - Everyday politics
 - Politics of policy
 - Hydropolitics
 - Global politics
- Issue-networks: choosing focus
- Assessment state of water sector reform



State of irrigation reform



Picture courtesy Jalaspandana, R. Doraiswamy



Refusal to learn?

- Involving irrigators in design: the conception of participation
- Main system management (Wade and Chambers 1980)
- Corruption/rent seeking (Wade 1982)



Overall assessment

Despite some positive lessons and experiences and localized progress in irrigation reform:

- Very little progress in policy and agency reform
- Debate has become repetitive
- We are stuck



'Sticking points'

- Hydrocracies successfully defend approaches focussing on:
 - ✓ Infrastructure creation
 - ✓ Supply enhancement (scarce water) and flood control (excess water)
- Overall acceptance of 'social engineering' paradigm in policy domain, but this fails
- Government's financial and civil society's policy pressure insufficiently strong
- Multilateral development funding agencies' reform packages have contradictory effects



Challenges to social engineering

- Internal: poor performance
- Controversies around large dams: displacement and ecology
- Budget squeeze
- Democratisation/decentralisation pressures



Two main issues

1. Internalising new concerns: environment and human development
2. State-centric and society centric water policy processes



Lessons from examples

(EU/NL, USA, Australia)

- Non-replicable
- Change embedded in broader process
- New professional groups
- New technical challenges
- Ambiguous outcomes



Analysis – three levels

- Vested interests – political economy explanation (notably rent seeking)
- Institutional explanations – rigidity, hierarchy, etc.
- Knowledge system explanations – ‘mental maps’



State & society centric policy processes

- Different approaches (table)
- Examples: Uzbekistan, EU/NL, India



Research and policy

- Research *for* policy
- Research *on* policy
- Research *in* policy



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Thank you for your attention!