
REPUBLICA DE EL SALVADOR EN LA

WATERSHED GOVERNANCE AND POLICIES

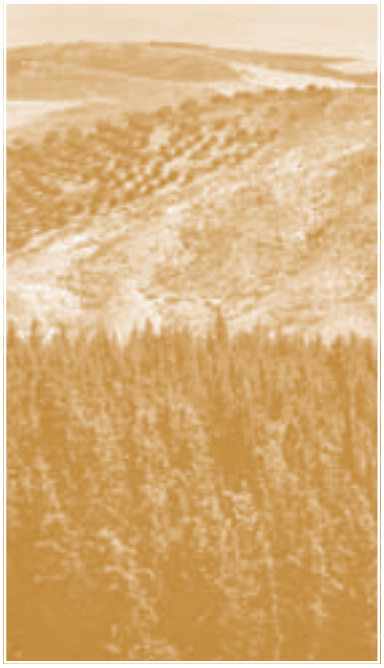
Municipality and district-level authorities are often the primary bodies responsible for household water supply. In some cases, management of drinking-water distribution has been linked to other water uses, such as hydropower or irrigation, as well as to forest management and land administration. This has given many municipalities and districts a pivotal role in watershed management.

Following political reforms in many countries during the 1990s, decentralization has strengthened local governments' mandate for watershed management and facilitated the involvement of civil society organizations and grassroots stakeholders. However, it has often been easier for central governments to devolve powers to lower units of government than to ensure that those units have the resources, capability and accountability necessary to fulfil their new functions. In many places, it is necessary to enhance the capacity of local governments and civil society stakeholders to deal with the organizational issues related to collaborative watershed management.

Although local participation, consensus and political will are vital, these factors alone are not enough to manage watersheds. Technical expertise is also needed to address the variety of engineering, forestry, agricultural, social and legal problems involved. The downstream impacts of local decisions have to be considered in policy-making, and external investments are needed to tackle upstream problems. Watershed management can therefore rarely be confined within the local governance arena. In cases where

Top: Watershed planning meeting in Gorkha district, Nepal
Centre: Participatory watershed mapping in Kanak Valley, Pakistan
Bottom: Collaborative watershed management workshop in Bellavista, eastern Bolivia

Opposite page: Municipal watershed planning in San Francisco de Lempa, El Salvador



Above: The role of forest plantations in protecting watershed has often been misconceived and exaggerated (Tunisia)

watersheds overlap the territories of more than one administrative unit, watershed management institutions are needed to harmonize the interests and needs of different sites and different locations.

Watershed governance is unlikely to succeed if a supportive policy environment is lacking. Watershed management policies should be based on a sound understanding of watershed processes and their actual costs and benefits. Policy-makers often find it difficult to accept the uncertainty about long-term watershed planning, however, and tend to rely on outdated, oversimplified models. This can result in false assumptions and misconceptions about policies' expected short-term impacts. Many experts now believe that for decades watershed management policies were based on myths or common wisdom, rather than on concrete, scientific evidence. For instance, the role of forestry plantation in regulating water flows has been often overestimated and oversimplified.

THE SASSARI DECLARATION

In 2002-2003, FAO carried out an inter-regional review of watershed management policies and practices. The review process culminated in a conference at Sassari, Italy, where a final declaration was issued.

According to this declaration: "There is a need to focus increased global and regional attention on watershed management because watersheds integrate resources, environmental services, uses and users; watersheds connect people who may never meet and may vary greatly in terms of wealth, livelihoods and culture; good planning requires good understanding of linkages between upstream and downstream hydrologic and land-use systems; investments are long-term and generate benefits and costs across large distances; and interventions that are good for individuals or communities may be detrimental to wider societal interests.

"Some of the key elements of the guidelines for the next generation of watershed management programmes include: a multisectoral approach; a combination of bottom-up and top-down planning, monitoring and evaluation; clear procedures for environmental impact assessment of interventions, including dams and reservoirs; networking among key stakeholders; consideration of socio-economic and cultural aspects and natural processes; gender balance in decision-making; embracing new approaches for sharing knowledge and learning; sustainable finance; compensation mechanisms; capacity building at all levels; reforming governance; linking surface, groundwater and coastal water sources; shift from looking at supply to demand of water; efficiency of water use; coping with hydrologic extremes and natural hazards; and the integrated management of water, vegetation, soils and sediments."

During the last 15 years, most national governments and regional organizations have addressed watershed management in the framework of their water, soil and forest conservation policies. In some cases, watersheds have been used as the territorial units for implementing rural poverty alleviation and food security programmes. Subsequently, strong links have been made and developed between watershed management and sustainable agriculture and rural development policies in upland areas. The International Year of Mountains (2002), the International Year of Freshwater (2003) and the 2003 International Mountain Day played a catalytic role in this trend.

Watershed management experts have recently recommended that water supply should be the central point at which different sectors — such as agriculture, irrigation and forestry — should converge. Several national governments are now reviewing their policies according to a watershed management perspective.

Above: Poster for the first International Mountain Day, 11 December 2003

SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL WATER POLICY

In 1997, the Government of South Africa adopted a national water policy with three objectives: equitable access to water, sustainable use of water, and efficient and effective water use. Based on these objectives, the National Water Act (1998) was issued to provide for the development, conservation, management and control of South Africa's water resources. The National Water Resource Strategy describes how water resources have to be managed in accordance with the policy and law. It includes the following provisions:

- Water will be regarded as an indivisible national asset. National government will act as the custodian of the nation's water resources, and its powers in this regard will be exercised as a public trust.
- Water required to meet basic human needs and maintain environmental sustainability will be guaranteed as a right; water use for all other purposes will be subject to a system of administrative authorizations.
- The responsibility and authority for water resource management will be progressively decentralized to suitable regional and local institutions. These will have appropriate community, ethnic and gender representation to enable all interested people to participate.

A vital element of the National Water Resource Strategy is the creation of catchment management agencies, which are in charge of developing watershed management strategies in collaboration with water user associations.

Source: Based on S. Rademeyer. 2006. Processes that will influence resource allocation in the Republic of South Africa. In Watershed Management and Sustainable Mountain Development Working Papers No. 8. Rome, FAO.