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MENA Regional Water Governance Benchmarking Brief



Image: K. Conniff

Multiple uses of water

Population growth and rising demands for food, housing and jobs place extreme pressures on the Middle East's already limited water resources. Some countries are attempting to overcome their shortages by tapping deep, nonrenewable groundwater resources or investing in expensive desalination plants. Others try wringing more value out of each drop that is used. Good water management is critical as the costs and value of water continue to rise, and potential disputes over water threaten to exacerbate existing political tensions.

To help meet these challenges, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) developed an innovative regional water strategy termed the Blue Revolution Initiative. Its latest project is the \$1.5 Million Regional Water Governance Benchmarking project (ReWaB), launched in September 2008 and sponsored by USAID's Office of Middle East Programs. Slated to run for 18 months, International Resources Group (IRG), together with its implementing partners will build a strategic framework and establish indicators and benchmarks to guide and monitor national progress on improving water governance in the MENA region.

APPROACH

Our approach to this project is built around four tasks.

Framework Development

We will develop a flexible common analytic framework useful in describing the governance context of water resource development and management in the Middle East. Important dimensions include national and regional policies, laws and implementing rules, and implementing organizations. These broad dimensions will be subdivided into elements which can serve as a basis for benchmarking capacity and performance. The approach to framework development will include a review of the theoretical literature, reviews of concepts and frameworks developed for similar purposes, and extensive consultation with a broad spectrum of key stakeholders and experts.

Implementing Partners

Lead: IRG

Other Partners

- International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
- Institute for Water and Watersheds at Oregon State University (OSU)
- Computer Assisted Development Incorporated (CADI)
- Nile Consultants
- ECO Consult

[Photo: Mark Svendsen]



The Nile at Aswan

Policy, Legal, and Organizational Assessments

With an analytic framework in hand, the project will conduct policy, legal, and organizational reviews in selected countries. Resulting country profiles will be based on meta-reviews of existing analyses, fresh analysis of laws and policies where required, and an organizational mapping. For the mapping exercise, all significant organizations having a role in water governance will be identified and a functional/organizational matrix created, overlaying important water sector functions on the organizations available to perform them. This will allow critical gaps and areas of overlap to be identified.

The important policy and legal documents we use will be assembled into a searchable on-line database. This document database will be used in the policy and legal analyses and will also be available on line to the public. The project will also survey and review existing web-based document collections and networks focused on the MENA region to provide cross-linkage and ensure complementarity.

Benchmarking System Development

Building on these results, we will identify a simple but robust set of indicators for benchmarking water governance practices and performance. We

will collect information to estimate baselines and five and 20 year values for indicators through a combination of secondary sources, surveys of experts, and stakeholder workshops. To showcase a way of assessing water service delivery performance, the project will work with partners to specify a set of indicators in the selected countries, along with standards for measurement and data management. This pilot activity will help inform the more

challenging future task of benchmarking performance of irrigation service delivery and then applying such a system to management of aquatic ecosystems.

Outreach

Throughout the project, we will work to build committed constituencies for the governance benchmarking system, beginning by soliciting national participation in devising and refining the conceptual framework. In developing national institutional profiles, we will work closely with those stakeholders in both the public and private sectors. We will also develop benchmarking indicators collaboratively and use projections under alternative scenarios to highlight the significance of alternative water governance arrangements and practices.