

# Civil Society Session: Civil society dealing with water scarcity and allocation

Session report, 16 January 2015

## 2. Civil Society dealing with water scarcity and allocation

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The session was convened by Jonathan Lautze of the International Water Management Institute. The purpose of the session was to address the challenges and issues to deal with water scarcity. This included the need for substantially increasing water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater, and implementing integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.

Civil Society participation in water resources management is essential. Sound, effective and equitable water management requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders at all levels, from high-level decision-makers, through to water managers, utility workers, implementers and technical personnel, as well as policy-makers from governments and the private sector, through to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), indigenous peoples' organizations and citizen water user groups, women and youth.

### Session structure

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- Overview presentation/Introduction, Jonathan Lautze, IWMI
- Main case study presentation Khin NiNi Thein, Ayeyarwadi River Basin Research Organisation (ARBRO), Myanmar
- Panell and team work: What role for civil society in improving WRM and addressing scarcity? What are the specific tools and obstacles for civil society actors to improve Water Resource Management?

#### Panellists

- **Financing:** Ohnmar Khaing, Food Security Working Group Myanmar
- **Capacity development:** Swe Swe Aye, Ayeyarwady River Basin Research Organisation (ARBRO), Myanmar
- **Technology:** Khin Tein Htwe, Water Research and Training Centre (WRTC), Myanmar
- **Governance:** Soe Soe Tun, Water Mothers (WMs) Myanmar

In a participatory 'Graffiti Wall' participants rotated in 4 groups to give their inputs in relation to the questions under these 4 means of implementation. Report back and wrap-up.

### Introduction

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Jonathan Lautze, IWMI introduces the session by looking into how the SDS deal with water management resources. In particular:

- By 2030, substantially increase water use efficiency across all sectors, and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity
- By 2030, implement IWRM at all scales, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate
- By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and increasing recycling and safe reuse by [x] percent globally
- By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

The introduction was followed by a main case study presented by Khin NiNi Thein, Ayeyarwadi River Basin Research Organisation (ARBRO), Myanmar.

**Lead case study: Dealing with scarcity through effective water management and allocation: Civil Society as agent for Change (NWRC and ARBRO et .al.)**

Decades of close door policy and top down decision making system without any consideration for participatory approach, let alone to give room/space for inclusiveness, have severely constrained the ability for people in Myanmar to freely organize themselves and speak up. Since 2011, the Government of Myanmar has taken a new approach that practices relaxation and liberalization towards free trade economy, which has led to begin the process of political and economic reforms. Water is a major driving force and essential ingredient for any economic and social activities. However, due to lack of Integrated Water Resources Management, the more economic activities increase the more water resources suffer. It has reached to the level of urgency that water professionals in Myanmar could no longer keep the silence. At some point the water professionals slowly reached out to decision makers in Myanmar including the President's Office to address the water, development and environment issues through the lens of water-energy-food nexus. The Myanmar water professionals initiated this process and succeeded in starting up a dialogue with influential and authorised leaders in the water sector in Myanmar.

[Link to case study](#)

## **Challenges and tools to improve Water Resource Management**

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### ***Financing***

Mismanagement in financing, both in the utilisation and distribution of funds is considered an important challenge. Increased accountability and transparency is needed to address it. There is often lack of information and capacity gaps in civil society as to where they can seek funding to undertake projects. Decisions must be taken coming from the local culture and bearing in mind how the financing tools are effective for the grassroots people. Multilevel involvement is needed, and therefore funding to engaging stakeholders from the different levels. It is not always necessarily to increase budgets, but more importantly, to allocate resources differently.

Governments should, for instance, invest sufficiently in capacitating the local actors as part of their water financing schemes.

### ***Capacity development***

The realization and implementation of the future vision for water requires extensive water-related capacity-building for individuals and institutions alike. Capacity-building is a package including technology, skills, information/knowledge; and most important, particularly in the case of marginalized groups, it's a question of building the confidence to speak up and to act. A combination of soft skills and hard skills is therefore crucial. Participative projects can be auspicious opportunities to foster this capacity, increase trust between stakeholders and enhance resilience. Civil society organizations and NGO's can play a vital role in building the capacity of civil society through education and creating awareness. Trust building between governments and civil society requires efforts from both sides and takes time, often more than a decade. Civil society organizations face frequent misconceptions, including between gender equality and feminism approaches, the perception that water should be free, and misconceptions between capacity building and training. In this sense, it's important to underline that too much focus on training does not necessarily lead to capacity development.

### ***Technology***

Translating scientific research for community appropriation is a very challenging issue. Communication problems and lack of participation of civil society (both men and women) need to be tackled. The experience of the Myanmar case study using rain water harvest fee, water filter and slow sand filter illustrated the need for awareness raising and training regarding the use of such technologies. Other challenges include addressing water shortage due to climate change, water pollution and mismanagement and high costs of safe technology. Participants noted the importance of having available a selection of technologies and approaches that the community can choose from to reinforce their capacity. Adapted and appropriate technology for special needs like ageing women was raised.

### ***Governance***

Key challenges include the need to custom-design systems with communities in order to push the shift of social norms and behaviours and create lasting change, while ensuring equity among communities and citizens. People must be able to participate in decisions on water and sanitation that affect their lives. Meaningful participation of civil society (water users, farmers, women, youth, etc.) in water resources management requires adequate information available to the public, public awareness about water issues, and institutional channels which allow the public to have a voice. True participation of the public requires that the guaranteed possibility to get involved in water resources management is the subject of formal procedures. The institutionalization of such mechanisms is therefore crucial. Local languages, customs and norms enrich and complement national ones which make communication easier and knowledge sharing somewhat more accessible.

The management of water resources is an issue particularly sensitive to the question of scale. The mismatch between administrative limits and hydrological boundaries can lead to local actors (eg. municipalities) placing their own interests ahead when designing and implementing water resources management policies and strategies, rather than integrating the needs of the river

basin and aquifers. Managing water resources efficiently can also be hindered by diverging interests between urban and rural areas for example, or between up-stream and downstream regions. This can hinder the water-use efficiency across sectors and prevent the adoption of convergent objectives for sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity.

## **Tools to improve Water Resource Management**

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Tools (solutions and opportunities) proposed regarding **financing** included developing trust funds and low-cost solutions like rainwater harvesting. Community contract and engagement from the very planning process is key to enable ownership, empowerment and sustainability. There is an interesting potential for further civil society coordination and collaboration in fundraising, increasing funding from varied sources and collective project prioritization involving users, including farmers groups. The Water Integrity Network is a tool to improve transparency and accountability.

The right to water and sanitation and people-centred approaches are key tools for **capacity building**. It is important to recognise the central role of women and to give value to intergenerational responsibility for transformation. Effective partnerships should be developed, enhancing peer-to-peer learning. The promotion of local knowledge and improving communities' communication and negotiation skills are important to enable empower people to negotiate. Other tools include promoting the 3 Rs – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and emphasizing the value and opportunities of improving WRM, including improving livelihoods, income generation and human development index.

Low cost and efficient water saving **technology** tools were highlighted, like basic watershed technology. RS and GIS technology were also raised, but stressing the need to have technology for the right people. Adaption where needed, peoples' access to related information in their own language and gender based initiatives should be taken into account. Sharing technology in the context of transboundary waters can enhance cooperation and efficiency.

An important **governance** tool raised in the session was progressive trust-building. To this end, mechanisms to connect civil society and government should be put in place, for example through National Water Resources Committees. Adequate legislation and enforcement of the right to access to information were equally raised. Other tools included identifying specific resources needs (human, financial, etc), taking ownership, participating, undertaking advocacy and providing concrete examples and results. Effective incentive systems and surveillance committees to monitor rivers / water basins was equally raised. Finally, adequate decentralization and transboundary cooperation through international UN and regional instruments were also valued tools.

**Session Photos:**



*Session panel*