

Introduction to IWRM part 1

1.1 History of water management

In the last 50 years of the 20th century dams and reservoirs were seen as the solution to create more water and to offer development benefits through (drinking) water supplies, flood control and energy supplying hydropower plants. Water managers focused on the distribution of water, they had technical solutions to allocate the water.

During the 1980s criticism on dams and reservoirs started as dams can have considerable environmental impact. Changing flows caused changes in fish stock and in nature areas downstream. Also human populations, living along the river were affected by the diminishing flows and lack of flooding. A few large scale dam projects had caused non-voluntary migration of people living in these areas. While dams saved water for some, it replaced the water scarcity to other areas.

Due to erosion upstream many reservoirs suffered from siltation, which led to considerable costs. Dams and reservoirs thus seemed not to be the only option to control water resources.

Water managers started to look for alternative solutions. Critics argued that one needed to look beyond the knowledge of the hydraulic engineer alone; a multidisciplinary team could better understand the complexity of water management. They argued that a good water management project should take into account effects on the environment and the society.

Meanwhile it became clear that many countries were running out on water resources. This increasing water scarcity caused a shift from an engineering approach towards a water management approach, which focused on many different technical, social and economic tools to use the available water more sustainably. One of the tools often used is public participation. Users and the ones affected by water management projects participate within the planning stage, which will cause people to be more committed to the final plans.

In 1992, the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development promoted the concept of Integrated Water Management, which took into account the vision which is mentioned above. By integrating different disciplines in water management; by taking into account different water users and their needs and by seeing water as an economic good, they promoted a more sustainable approach to water management.

This introduction is mainly based on the reader 'Integrated Water Management' by L.L.P.A. Santbergen and R.J. Barneveld, 2006

1.2 The GWP

The Global Water Partnership is a partnership among organizations involved in water management. Its mission is to “support countries in the sustainable management of their water resources”. The partnership was created by the World Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). The involved agencies, such as government agencies, public institutions, private companies, professional organizations, multilateral development agencies, are committed to the Dublin Principles which are developed during the Dublin Conference on Water and Environment in 1992. Their goal was to provide a worldwide network that could work together on sustainable water management and the introduction of participation mechanisms related to water. Nowadays their objectives are to:

- Clearly establish the principles of sustainable water resources management,
- Identify gaps and stimulate partners to meet critical needs within their available human and financial resources,
- Support action at the local, national, regional or riverbasin level that follows principles of sustainable water resources management,
- Help match needs to available resources.

The following paper will elaborate on their policies and describes the general vision on IWRM.

*This description is mainly derived from the website of the GWP:
www.gwpforum.org.*