

**DRAFT BASELINE DOCUMENT FOR
CROSS CUTTING PERSPECTIVE 2**

“Institutional Development and Political Processes”

**in preparation for the
IV World Water Forum**

Authors:

Dr José Esteban Castro, University of Newcastle upon Tyne

with

Dr María Luisa Torregrosa Armentia, FLACSO Mexico

Dr Adriana Allen, University College London

Mr Román Gómez González Cosío, National Water Commission (CNA), Mexico

Mr Jordi Vera, FLACSO Mexico

Ms Karina Kloster, FLACSO Mexico

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Main author's address: J.E.Castro@newcastle.ac.uk

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ACRONYMS

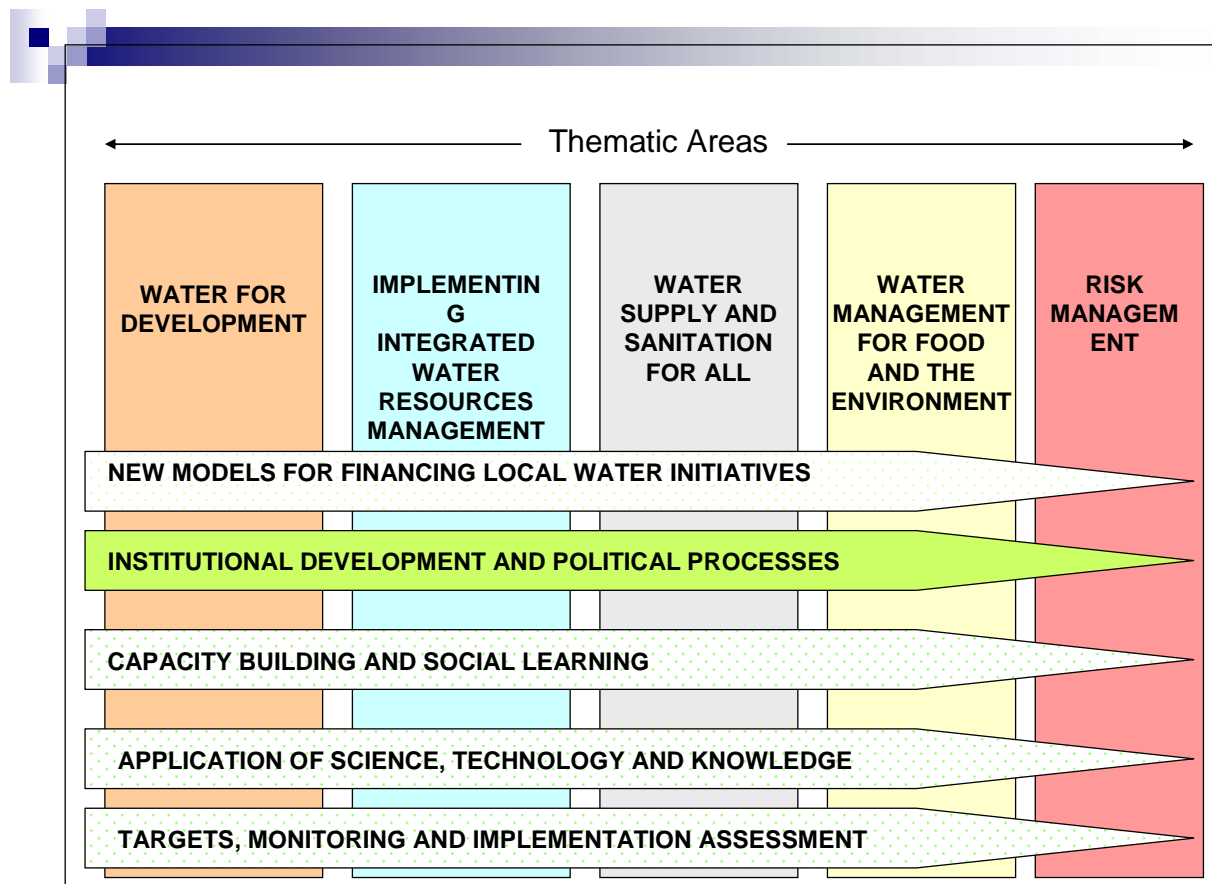
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CNA	National Water Commission (Mexico's Federal Water Authority)
EUWATER	European Network for a New Water Culture
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDI	German Development Institute
GWP	Global Water Partnership
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
LDC's	Least Developed Countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NRC	National Research Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSIRU	Public Services International Research Unit
UN	United Nations
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WB	World Bank
WFD	Water Framework Directive (European Union)
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSS	Water and Sanitation Services
WWF	World Water Forum

Introduction

This baseline document¹ corresponds to one of the five Cross-cutting Perspectives of the Fourth World Water Forum. These perspectives are aimed at providing tools for integrating the five Thematic Areas of the event, and a framework for the presentation of thematic sessions and local actions to be selected for participation. Figure 1 provides an insight into the scheme of the Thematic Areas and the Cross-cutting Perspectives of the Forum.

¹ We wish to thank the excellent comments to the draft version of this document received from the participants in the Virtual Discussion Forums, whose names are listed below. Most of the comments received came from Mexico, and to large extent they reflect some of the main problems being addressed in the local debate. We have made an effort to include this comments in the text in order to take into account the criticisms or to improve the overall argument, but at the same time we have strived to preserve the more general character of this paper, which is aimed at providing a general critical reflection applicable to the international debate that we hope will take place at the IV World Water Forum. Obviously, we are also interested in promoting debate over the particular forms that the relationship between “institutional development” and “political processes” takes in each region and in each specific context, in Mexico and elsewhere, but we cannot achieve that level of detail in this short paper. In some cases, we have added a footnote with clarifications. Although we were unable to include all the suggestions received, as this is a short document oriented at fostering an international debate, we look forward to address these issues in more depth during the Forum and after that to continue working on these problems in our future research and teaching activities. We want to thank particularly the contributions made by following people: Arsenio González (Institute of Social Studies, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM); Luis de la Cruz, Gerardo Palacios and Jorge Torres Llamas (workers of the Mexico City Water System); Sophie Esch (Heinrich Böll Foundation); Dora Ordóñez (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, Mexico); Balbina Hernández, (Equidad y Género, Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, SEMARNAT); David Barkin (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, UAM-Xochimilco); Fernando Saavedra (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO-México); Paco Puche (Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua, España); Eric Mollard (Instituto Mexicano de Tecnología del Agua, IMTA); Peter Newborne (Research Associate, Water Policy Programme, Overseas Development Institute ODI-Reino Unido); Gustavo Córdoba (El Colegio de la Frontera, COLEF, México); Blanca Jiménez (Instituto de Ingeniería, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM); Alexis A. Niebla Aguiar, Servicios de Ordenamiento de Suelos y Aguas, Mexicali, Baja California, México.

Figure 1. Thematic Areas and Cross-cutting Perspectives



The document is grounded on a number of premises emerging from recent and ongoing research. We do not pretend that these premises will provide an exhaustive framework for addressing the vast array of problems mentioned in the text. Our aim is that these premises would offer a starting point, a tool to trigger the debate in the search for greater precision and depth in the analysis. For the same reason, this paper is not strictly academic and therefore does not pretend to deliver an exhaustive coverage of the different authors that have addressed the issues that we discuss, which would be impossible to do in the short document. A key element in our approach, as it can be deduced from the title of this Cross-cutting Perspective, is the centrality of political processes in the development of water-related institutional arrangements. For the same reason, our document does not engage at the same lever of detail with other processes that also have crucial

importance, such as the social, economic-financial, ecological, etc., given that these are beyond the scope of this modest piece of work. Likewise, we cannot review in greater detail here, as some of our readers wished, some controversial concepts like “development”, although we have made reference to other work where we address some of these topics or to other authors that have done specific work on these issues, which we hope will facilitate deepening the discussion. Also, it is important to clarify that when we refer to “political processes” we are not reducing the political to party politics nor to electoral politics, but we use a concept of the political that is more general and includes the electoral and party-politics dimensions. We recover here a concept of the political as the space of public affairs, and when we refer in the text to political processes and actors we are not thinking merely in elections, in the exercise of formal political power, or in political parties, but rather to the political dimension of processes that, like development processes, are multidimensional in character. In this regard, “development processes” themselves have a political dimension that obviously cannot be reduced to the development policies of a given political party or government, which are only one component of the political character of such processes. Thus, a given model of development, for instance a model grounded in a technocratic notion of development, has a political character that needs to be identified and subject to debate. This political character of a given development model is not identical to the particular expressions that development policies make take in the agenda of political parties, as suggested by the fact that in recent decades political parties of the most diverse affiliations have accepted the apparent “inevitability” of a model of development grounded precisely on a strong technocratic approach. The main political opposition to such model of development, as a general trend, has not come from political parties, and has rather been carried out primarily by actors situated outside the formal political system. Therefore, even when we refer later to political processes such as

“governance” or “citizenship” we do it from the perspective of this wider concept of the political, which is not reduced to the exercise of formal political power or to formal political actors such as governments or citizens, legally speaking. We approach the political from a sociological perspective whereby the exercise of power that characterizes the political is not reduced to its legal-institutional aspects.

As already explained, the aim of this document is to present a critical perspective that can foster debate and provide the basis for meaningful dialogue and cooperative practical action in relation to water.² In this regard, the document starts from the following assumptions:

- 1) institutional development is part and parcel of the wider process of development, which is multidimensional and encompasses social, economic-financial, political, institutional, technological, cultural, and ecological aspects;³
- 2) development is not linear or necessary, but it can be distinguished from directionless or regressive change. Development is change, identifiable as the fulfilment of possibilities inherent in an earlier state, which results in qualitative and quantitative improvement of existing conditions;
- 3) current development goals adopted by the international community in relation to water, such as the water component of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), include particularly “poverty reduction” and “sustainability”, but both the definition of these goals and the potential for achieving them are determined by and dependent upon processes that are essentially of a political nature;⁴

² We have made an effort to avoid the term “water sector” in order to overcome the prevailing notion of water issues being organized as one among many other discrete “sectors” of activity, which conveys an image of unconnectedness and separation. Rather, we aim to explore how water issues are interconnected and interwoven with other processes.

³ For the sake of clarity, in our perspective the process of development cannot be reduced to its economic dimension and, therefore, our understanding differs substantially from conventional notions of development that tend to identify it with economic growth. In this regard, a large share of the prevailing policies in relation to water continue to be informed by a restricted and even narrow understanding of “development, and this document attempts to present a critical vision of such policies. For references on critical approaches to the prevailing concept of development that we have taken into consideration in our work we suggest that readers interested in deepening the analysis look at, among others: Martínez Alier, 2002; Peet and Watts, 1993, 2004; Redclift, 1995.

⁴ In addition, official development programmes are predicated on policies that seek to achieve consensus on a number of controversial issues, such as the need to eradicate public and private corruption practices or the decision to promote social participation in the decision-making process, just to give some examples. However, and with few exceptions, these programmes do not go much beyond the rhetoric and in practice it can be observed the persistence if not worsening of corrupt practices and authoritarianism, which hinder the effective democratization of the governance of water and water-related services.

4) political processes are a crucial explanatory factor of the “water crisis” facing the international community, whether we refer to the gap in water and sanitation services (WSS) targeted by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to the widespread degradation and depletion of aquatic ecosystems and aquifers, or to the threats and hazards connected with water use and management in different areas of activity;

5) water institutions are both the result and the vehicle of such political processes, which inform institutional change and development in relation to water;

6) political processes are essentially about exercising power and can be better understood as (but not reduced to) an ongoing confrontation between rival political projects which is staged by rival political actors. The processes of governance and citizenship are essential components of these wider political processes;

7) achieving consensus and fostering cooperation about the political decisions and institutional arrangements needed to face the challenges posed by the “water crisis” cannot be done while ignoring these confrontations between rival political projects;

8) crucial issues such as the lack of consensus in the international community about the universal entitlement to essential water and sanitation services as a human right, about the role of the private and the public sectors in the provision of WSS, or about the need to implement the Precautionary Principle in water management are good examples of the existence of such rival, often irreconcilable political projects, which needs to be addressed;

9) we believe that one of the most promising strategies for addressing the “water crisis” is to bring together the scientific and technological community with the social actors of the relevant political processes involved in the struggle for developing institutional arrangements in relation to water that are ecologically and socially sustainable and equitable; a high priority in this strategic action will be the search for solutions and alternative models of development to end social inequalities and injustice in the access to essential water and sanitation services.

Therefore, the aim of this document is to provide a framework for dialogue that recognizes the existence of rival political positions and value systems in relation to water and acknowledges that meaningful dialogue, consensus, and cooperation cannot happen unless this confrontation is recognised and acted upon. As shown below, these are fundamental components of the processes of governance and citizenship, which are punctuated by ongoing confrontations between rival political projects grounded on alternative value systems and principles. Acquiring a better

understanding of how these confrontations shape and determine policy and institutional arrangements constitutes a prerequisite for attaining the goals of social justice and sustainability in relation to water.

In consequence, the authors of this document believe that this dialogue must be conducted with all relevant actors, making a clear effort to avoid exclusions and engaging groups and social sectors that are normally disempowered in the political processes. The process of exclusion takes place for different reasons, whether it is because the actors are not part of (or are not represented by) the formal political system or do not have access to the legal-institutional mechanisms necessary for the exercise of substantive citizenship rights and for effective social participation in relation to water problems. This engagement of social and political actors in an open debate about water must start urgently if the objective is to foster a meaningful dialogue conducive to a truly participative and productive IV World Water Forum (WWF) in March 2006. In this regard, the partners involved in this document put forward this baseline text to a wide discussion with scientific and social networks at the international level, and sought to promote an open dialogue on the text through the Virtual Discussion Forums (in English and Spanish), in the search for feedback and criticism before producing this final version. In any case, as already said, the main aim of this document is to trigger the debate and therefore it poses more questions than answers. Our main proposal consists in giving the political character of the “water crisis” a central place in the analysis, and thus making a contribution towards its eventual solution.

From the premises highlighted above a number of questions can be derived that may help to trigger the discussion about institutional development and political processes in relation to water along the lines of the five thematic areas:

- Which are the particular political processes that are crucial for understanding and explaining the “water crisis” and for exploring the potential for cooperative solutions in each of the five thematic areas?
- What forms do the specific political processes that underpin the existing institutional arrangements take in each of these areas?
- Who are the social and institutional actors that are the main protagonists of these political processes? What is their degree of legitimacy? What are the mechanisms by which these actors obtain legitimacy to perform their roles?
- What are the conditions that facilitate or hinder the effective participation of the actors that are not part of the formal political system or who do not have access to the legal-institutional mechanisms that are needed to participate?
- Which institutional arrangements have been or can be identified as required for achieving the goals of the international community for water issues (particularly those required to achieve universal access to essential water and sanitation; sustainability; food security; adequate management of water risks, etc.)?
- Which political processes –and in what conditions– can contribute towards the successful development of such institutional arrangements? And which ones would rather hinder the sought development?

In order to provide a framework that triggers the debate in search for answers to these and other questions, we have structured the document in three sections. 1) The “water crisis”, containing a brief discussion of the water situation at the global level to provide the framework for identifying the key political processes underpinning the present “water crisis”. 2) Key political processes, identifying the political processes of governance and citizenship as key for understanding and tackling the “water crisis”. We discuss here how these processes are punctuated by ongoing confrontations between rival intellectual and political projects. 3) Institutional arrangements, with suggestions for debating the interaction between political processes and institutional development in relation to water.

1. The “water crisis”⁵

We need first to make clear that refer to the “crisis” with inverted commas to highlight the controversial and complex character of this concept. On the one hand, as it emerges from the information provided below there is hard evidence to postulate the objective existence of a global water crisis. However, the dimensions and real extent of such crisis as well as the characteristics of the social and geographical distribution of its impact are object of continued controversy and are open to debate. The lack of reliable statistics in many countries and regions is one the most important obstacles for reaching consensus about the scope and, in the extreme, the very existence of the “water crisis”. On the other hand, one of the key arguments structuring this paper is that the “water crisis” is not caused by natural or climatic conditions, nor is it the result of processes entirely beyond human control. On the contrary, many aspects of the “crisis”, whether it is the lack of access to essential water and sanitation services or the pollution and degradation of water sources, are the consequence of human actions. In this specific sense, it can be argued that the water crisis is a social construction. However, by this we do not mean that the crisis is a kind of imaginary construction that only exists as a product of the mass media propaganda or other processes that influence and generate public opinion. Our argument is a) that the crisis must be understood as having both social and natural components, b) that it s feasible to record and measure certain aspects of the crisis with objective data and, c) that it is produced by the activities of human beings interacting with each other and with the environment.⁶

In this regard, we now offer in the following paragraphs some data that provide an empirical framework to talk about the “water crisis”. From the total water volume on earth (estimated as

⁵ The following section is based mainly on Castro (2005) and EUWATER (2005).

about 1400 million km³) only 2.5 per cent (about 35 million km³) is freshwater, and the usable portion of this freshwater for human consumption is less than 1 per cent. Global water consumption has been doubling every 20 years, more than twice the rate of population growth. If current trends persist, some estimates suggest that by 2025 freshwater demand may increase by over 50 per cent. The situation is more acute in many countries considered to be less developed where most of the increase in demand is expected, and where desertification, pollution, and depletion of water sources are reducing the freshwater available. These problems are compounded by competition between uses and users, the unevenness in the geographical distribution of water sources, the inequities in the access to water, and the institutional “crises” affecting water management. An example of such problems can be found in the contradictions that can be observed between the demand for more irrigation water and the need to save water for preserving aquatic ecosystems and. Thus, while food security experts alert that the volumes of water used for irrigation, which currently accounts for about 70 per cent of the world’s freshwater consumption, will have to be increased by 15 to 20 per cent until the year 2025, environmentalists claim that to stop desertification and preserve the already stressed water sources, water use must be reduced by at least 10 per cent during the same period.⁷ To these worrying trends it must be added that the evidence suggest that the process of climatic change, whether anthropogenic or not, is exacerbating existing water conflicts and contributing to the emergence of new ones.

⁶ About the ongoing debate on the concept of “social construction” in relation to ecological and environmental problems, see among other authors: Castree and Braun (1998); Burningham and Cooper (1999); Woodgate and Redclift (1998); Velody and Williams (1998).

⁷ Be it for personal consumption, aquaculture / agricultural uses, industrial activities or hydroelectric power creation the amount of water used at a global scale is increasing dramatically (estimates suggest that an extra 5600km³ of water will be required in the year 2050). The global average per capita availability of 6895 m³/inhab/year (UN, 2003) is extremely variable according to the country and can be taken as a very basic guideline to evaluate the country’s hydraulic resources (FAO, 2003). Furthermore, average availability does not show the unbalanced distribution within countries themselves. Under such circumstances, overexploitation of aquifers in relative water scarcity zones is a growing concern.

Despite the fact that in average there is enough freshwater for all human beings on earth⁸, 1.1 billion people (17 per cent of the world population) have no access to safe drinking water. These figures do not reflect the fact that in many countries the quality of drinking water is often inadequate, whether because of the harmful effects of excessive chlorination or because of the lack of adequate treatment. It is expected that the current situation will be further aggravated if the predicted patterns of migration and population growth take place. However, in addition to covering present needs, the principle of sustainability informing the current goals of the international community requires preserving water sources for future generations, which poses further challenges.

Furthermore, wastewater management, pollution of water sources,⁹ and the provision of safe sanitation services constitute one of the most crucial water challenges. A large proportion of water-related risks and threats to human life are linked to or even caused by the way aquatic ecosystems, aquifers and water services are developed and managed. It is estimated that 2.4 billion people (40 per cent of the world population) lack basic sanitation services (European Commission, 2002b), and more than 5 million people still die¹⁰ each year from preventable water-related infections (European Commission, 2002a; WHO, 2003b). It is estimated that between one fourth and one third of human morbi-mortality is directly attributable to environmental risk factors, among which water-related aspects are paramount (Sims and Butter, 2000; Smith et. al., 1999; UN et. al., 1998; UNCHS, 1996).

⁸ Estimates suggest that there is in average 6895 m³ per capita per year (World Bank, 2003 cited in CNA, 2004).

⁹ It is estimated that globally only around 10 per cent of wastewater is treated before releasing it back into the environment, and the estimated figure is less than 5 per cent in countries considered as less developed.

¹⁰ While millions are affected by long-term illnesses caused by the intake of health-threatening substances naturally present in water such as sulphates, arsenic, or manganese.

These problems are part and parcel of new patterns in the relationship between humans and water that have been accelerated since the mid twentieth century, which include the expansion of intensive agriculture, the production of hydro-energy, and increasingly the development of aquaculture. This was a brief characterization of the global water situation to introduce our discussion on political processes and institutional development.¹¹

¹¹ For a detailed assessment of global water issues see: UNESCO (2003); UN-Habitat (2003); Gleick et. Al. (2004). Also check for updated information at UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme (www.unesco.org/water/wwap).

2. Key political processes

From our perspective the reasons for the global “water crisis” are not merely technical, infrastructural, or economic-financial as it is often argued, and the clues for understanding and tackling the problems are to be found in the socio-economic, political, institutional, and cultural dimensions. Particularly, in those countries considered as less developed political and policy-institutional issues are often more important than technical or infrastructural failures for understanding the “water crisis”. This is especially important if we think, for example, of the development goals in relation to essential water uses, such as water for basic sanitation or for subsistence agriculture, but it is also very relevant for other uses such as the preservation of aquatic ecosystems.¹² In this context, we have identified two main political processes that we consider as particularly relevant for understanding and explaining the water crisis: the processes of governance and citizenship.¹³ We address these two processes later in this section, but let us state briefly here the main reasons for our choice.

¹² It is also crucial to distinguish different priorities in water use such as essential uses for human survival and for living a dignified life, in contrast with other uses such as irrigation for agribusiness or water consumption for tourism and leisure (e.g. golf fields, hotels, etc.). For a more detailed consideration of these use categories and their scale of priorities see for instance EUWATER (2005).

¹³ It is important to recognise here that both “governance” and “citizenship” are concepts derived from the specific historical experience of the western world, particularly the countries considered as more developed. Discussing the situation in other countries by using these concepts requires a careful exercise in order to avoid mechanical and simplistic assumptions in the analysis. On the other hand, these are controversial concepts that may lead to a misunderstanding of what is being argued in this paper. Still, we consider that, in the current historical context, these concepts have crucial relevance for studying the water crisis. We have made an attempt to clarify some of these problems and to make our own position in this debate explicit. Also, we give here references to a relevant bibliography for those readers who may want to explore this debate more in depth, as this paper only aims at providing an introduction to the main topics. Finally, we want to make clear that our selection of these processes as a starting point for debate and reflection does not mean that we reduce the socio-political dimension to those aspects related with governance and citizenship. This is a thematic choice oriented at promoting an open debate among all sectors involved and we believe that these concepts provide the adequate platform for such debate. Although some of the authors of this paper are consistently critical of the prevailing conceptualization of “governance” and “citizenship”, we are aware that these concepts are highly relevant in the contemporary global debate and therefore we believe that they provide an excellent point of departure for the analysis and, eventually, for developing alternative and critical approaches to these processes.

The process of governance is predicated on the ongoing confrontation between rival political projects and shapes and provides direction to the organization of the social units under consideration (regions, countries, etc.). Governance results from the interaction between the key power holders, the state, large businesses, political parties, civil and other organizations representing sectoral interests (e.g. workers' unions, religious organizations, peasant movements, etc.), international agencies (e.g. international financial institutions and other agents of the process of "global governance"), and other relevant actors. Although the process of governance has been often presented in the literature as a balanced partnership between equals, in fact there are fundamental asymmetries of power and knowledge between the actors which determine the characteristics and direction of the overall process.

In turn, citizenship refers to the process by which individuals become members of a political unit, like a nation state or a union of nation states (e.g. the European Union), and is composed by bundles of rights and duties bonding the individual to the political community. However, both the actual rights and duties involved and the capacity that individuals have to exercise their rights and comply with their duties change over time, as they are subject to ongoing political confrontations over the scope and depth of citizenship. For instance, by the late nineteenth century it became widely accepted in Europe, the US, and increasingly in many other countries, that the provision of safe water and sanitation was a social duty and a state responsibility toward its citizens, and eventually these services became a fundamental component of the social rights of citizenship, such as the right to good health and to dignified living conditions. However, this understanding was always challenged by political sectors that believed that these services must have the status of a commodity and be provided through the market, and who refused to accept that the provision of such services constitute a state duty towards its citizens

and therefore they are a social, public good. The actors who defend this market approach to essential services seek to cancel the notion that there is a universal right of citizenship to certain goods and services such as essential water and sanitation. Since the 1980s, these actors have been able to introduce substantial institutional transformations in relation to the management of water and water services globally, with the objective of eradicating the notion that these services constitute a social right of citizenship: these reforms aim at transforming such services into commodities and reducing citizens to the role of consumers.

In this regard, a fundamental premise in this document is that a large share of the processes of institutional change in relation to water and water-related services that have taken place in recent decades had little relation with water or with the ecological process at all. Key drivers of these institutional changes have been the radical transformations in the political processes of governance and citizenship that took place since the 1980s. For instance, it is worth highlighting the policies of liberalization, de- and re-regulation, privatization, commercialization, and marketization of water and water services worldwide, which are mainly the result of radical political transformations in the global economy that took place in the late twentieth century. These transformations, largely unrelated to water issues, included an increase of world trade up to the levels reached before the First World War, the expansion of foreign direct investment in most developed economies, the global growth of transnational companies, and the internationalization of capital flows, which were among the key factors leading to the abandonment of the world trade regime sanctioned by the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944. First the decision by the US to abandon the dollar-gold convertibility in 1971 and shortly after the cancellation of the fixed-exchange-rates regime in 1973, underpinned a cycle of global economic crises manifested particularly in unprecedented levels of international debt and extreme volatility of currency values

and commodity prices. In turn, the new economic and policy environment was consolidated with the abandonment of the Keynesian economic model in 1979-80 by the OECD countries and the ensuing world-wide implementation and promotion of far-reaching institutional reforms, broadly known as “neo-liberal”.¹⁴ These processes have accelerated the historical trend of capitalism towards the increasing mercantilization of the elements of the biosphere, including water, but at the same time have provoked the emergence at the global scale of ever more vocal and active social movements opposing such mercantilization of life.¹⁵

These political transformations are particularly relevant to understand the process of change in relation to water issues, as they have informed far-reaching institutional reforms in this field since the 1980s. These include constitutional reforms to create markets for the allocation of water (e.g. in Chile, Peru, Mexico), decentralization of water operations (e.g. transfer of irrigation districts to users’ organizations and delegation of responsibility for water and sanitation services to municipalities in Mexico), privatization (full divestiture) of water and sanitation utilities (e.g. England and Wales; Chile), active promotion of different forms of private sector participation to replace public-sector providers in water and sanitation services (e.g. concessions, service contracts, etc., worldwide), among other issues.¹⁶ However, these “top-down” political transformations have been also matched by “bottom-up” processes characterized by a rising awareness of ecological problems, and of the water crisis in particular, which has particular expression in the local and global social and political networks involved with a wide range of

¹⁴ See, for instance, the accounts of these wider political transformations provided by Stiglitz (2002); Leys (2001); Brett (2000); Clarke (1994).

¹⁵ On this, see among other authors: Evans (2000); de Sousa Santos (2005); de Sousa Santos and Rodríguez Garavito (2005).

¹⁶ For a recent analysis of the relationship between the wider political transformations and the reforms introduced in the water institutions, especially in relation to water and sanitation, see for instance Castro and Laurie (2004); see also PSIRU (2005); Swyngedouw (2004); Taylor (1999). On the reforms to create markets for water resources, see: Bauer (2004).

problems from the forced displacement of population owing to large infrastructure works (e.g. dams) and the need for protecting fragile ecosystems, to the defence of high-quality public-sector water and sanitation utilities and the struggle for the recognition of the human right to essential water and sanitation services.

2.1. Governance and citizenship

At the global scale, the long-standing recognition of the urgent need for action has prompted renewed commitments from the international community, which include the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN, 2000, 2002).¹⁷ However, despite these laudable formal commitments there is an increasing recognition that achieving the MDGs may not be possible unless radical decisions are taken urgently. This is particularly true in crucial areas such as the need to strengthen local authorities and communities in their central roles as actors in their development process, in the key function of the public sector in the funding and management of water and water services, and in the search for original solutions to overcome the existing problems of inefficiency, corruption and lack of transparency and democratic social control. In this regard, there is strong consensus that in order to achieve the objectives of the international community in relation to water there is a need for “sound” and “effective water governance” given that what most countries face is a governance crisis rather than a water crisis (WWF, 2003).¹⁸

However, there exist different definitions of governance. For instance, the global actors linked to the multinational private water companies have provided a technical definition of

¹⁷ See “Milestones 1972 - 2003: from Stockholm to Kyoto” at UNESCO’s Water Portal (<http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/milestones/index.shtml>).

¹⁸ See also: ADB, 1995; Buse et. al., 2000; European Commission, 2000, 2002c; Taylor, 2002; GWP, 2003; UNDP, 2003; Camdessus, 2003.

governance as the “range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water resources, and the delivery of water services” (GWP, 2003). This is a useful definition in practical terms, but the emphasis here is placed on the institutional arrangements characterizing water management activities, while the relationship between these arrangements and the political process is lost. In this regard, other definitions place the emphasis on the attributes of “good governance”, which would include coordinated action at different levels (subsidiarity principle), transparency, and public participation by all sectors (active citizenship), including women and children (UN et al 1998; UNDP, 2003). For instance, in recent decades “good governance” has become an external conditionality prescribed by international institutions and a necessary prerequisite for the successful implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) programmes, as those envisaged in the European Water Framework Directive (European Union, 2000). Conversely, lack of adequate governance is regarded as a major constraint to development, and therefore donors, aid agencies, and international financial entities are increasingly requiring the adoption of “good governance” principles as a condition for loans and other aid instruments.

Unfortunately, although the concepts of “governance”, “sound governance”, “good governance”, and the like are used with the assumption that they reflect a common and accepted understanding of their basic meaning, in fact the use of these concepts often obscures underlying confrontations between rival theoretical bodies of knowledge and political and cultural traditions. Unsurprisingly, much of the mainstream debate on the topic has been aimed at depoliticising the processes under discussion and presenting them as mainly (or even merely) “technical” in nature. However, although the value of overcoming conflict situations and creating an “enabling environment” for achieving the goals set by the international community cannot be overlooked,

we also understand that they will not (cannot possibly) be achieved by depoliticising the processes encapsulated in the concept of “governance”. This problem, we believe, has to be addressed and reformulated.

2. 1. 1. Exploring the debate¹⁹

Rather than being just a matter of pure academic disquisition, the contradictions between confronting intellectual and political frameworks underscore much of the institutional and political transformations undergone in the water-related fields. Uncovering the intellectual roots of the governance models that have been designed and implemented during recent decades in relation to water is a crucial component of any discussion that aims to make a meaningful contribution to the problem.

In this regard, it is worth recalling that the concept of governance was first developed in economic analysis for the study of corporations and later adopted in political science to conceptualize forms of government and regulation that are not limited to those of traditional state hierarchies and market systems (Hirst, 1994; Held, 1995; Amin, 1997). In this connection, a large literature has been developed recently reflecting the ongoing debate about the transformations undergone in the field of “natural resources management”, especially since the early 1980s when “sustainable development policies” were officially adopted internationally. Some authors have described these transformations as the switch from a model based on “state monopoly” towards a new model based on “pragmatic pluralism” (Esman, 1991). Perhaps, one of the main contributions of this body of literature has been the acknowledgement of the multi-layered and multi-sector character

¹⁹ This section is based mainly on Castro (2006), and Castro and Laurie (2004).

of management regimes. Thus, in the perspective of these authors “governance” systems include the classic forms of authority embodied in the state (hierarchy) but also comprise private-management (market competition) and the voluntary-sector or “civil society” (organization based on participation and solidarity) management regimes (UNDP, 1997; Picciotto, 1997; see also Streeck and Schmitter, 1985). Accordingly, the model of multi-scale governance would be characterised by a combination of hierarchical structures, participatory dynamics, associative action, and market mechanisms, and would be based mainly on a culture of dialogue, negotiation, active citizenship, subsidiarity, and institutional strengthening (European Commission, 2001). Far from being an abstract academic discussion, this debate is having far-reaching consequences for public policy in general, and particularly in relation to water. Among other issues, this model has been translated into an ideal-type version that underscores the notions of “public-private partnerships” and “tri-partite partnerships”, which have become a key element in mainstream public policy and continue to be the object of debate and political confrontation worldwide. In this regard, one of the main bones of contentions in the debate is the fact that the idealized version of governance presents the state, the market and “civil society” as equal partners, with similar capacities, as forming part of a game based on symmetric interaction, when in fact the evidence shows that there exist large asymmetries of power and knowledge that run counter the key postulates of the idealized vision of governance. In practice, the policies of dismantling the public sector and introducing de and re-regulation, liberalization and mercantilization have tended to disproportionately strengthen the capacity for action, the power, and the control of knowledge exercised by private-sector actors, to the detriment of the capacities of the public sector and “civil society”, which have seen their role as partners in the governance system severely curtailed.

Further ambiguity and contradiction about the meaning of “governance” and “good governance” is found in the conceptualisation of “civil society”, “citizenship” or “market”.²⁰ For instance, these key elements of what can be called the “governance complex” mean radically different things for the free-market Anglo Saxon tradition, for the communitarian or pluralist traditions, or for radical thinkers. While for free-market liberalism civil society is identical to the market, a space characterized in this intellectual tradition as the result of the free concurrence of self-interested individuals, for pluralist and communitarian thinkers civil society is the realm of reciprocity and solidarity, a buffer space between the market and the state. Likewise, while the European social-democratic tradition, in its different national varieties, adopted the notion of universal access to basic services such as health and education as being a “social right of citizenship”, this notion is absent in the Anglo-Saxon free-market tradition for which citizenship is limited to the realm of civil and political rights.

These caveats of the definition of “governance” have been identified and form part of the wide-ranging debates taking place around the world (e.g. the Dialogue on Effective Water Governance, GWP, 2003). However, in practice, the prevailing governance model continues to alienate and exclude rather than including “civil society” and fostering meaningful partnerships. Although current policies formally acknowledge the multi-scale and multi-polar character of the governance structure, in practice, the system justifies the pre-eminence of market competition over the other governance realms such as the state or civil society, in the context of a technocratic model of development. Thus, converting the provision of essential public services such as water

²⁰ Given that this document is limited in scope and extension we cannot cover here all the different facets of the topic in the same depth. For instance, we have discussed in more detail the concept of governance, and to a lesser extent citizenship, but we cannot treat in other related concepts such as “civil society” or “market” with the same degree of detail, although they are also subject to important controversies. In relation to “civil society, see for example: Khilnani (2001); Cohen and Arato (1994). In relation to “market” and in specific reference to water, see Aguilera Klink (2002); Bauer (2004).

and sanitation or health care into private for-profit businesses has become the main driver of development in the prevailing policy model. Moreover, if well it is true that citizen participation was not part of the agenda of administrative rationalism²¹, it is also true that in the now prevailing model based on market rationalism²² (whether moderate or extreme) the citizen does not rank high and the system aims at limiting people's participation to their role of consumers. For the prevailing policy models "participation" often means "willingness" to accept decisions already taken with little or no consultation.

Although the principles of participation and civil-society involvement are at the heart of the recent commitments adopted by the international community, for instance those agreed at the successive UN conferences and summits, whereby the need for rights-based and people-centred policy models has been widely accepted, actually implementing change is not straightforward. Ongoing research has identified worrying trends suggesting that the global institutions, which play a key role in dictating public policies worldwide, are very reluctant to accept criticism and reassess their policy frameworks in the light of repeated failures. Global institutions continue to commit their efforts in the implementation of programmes that are largely blind to the needs, requirements, values, opinions, and preferences of people in countries considered to be less developed, especially the most disadvantaged. The evidence suggests that in a large number of cases since the 1990s these policies have contributed to create an imbalance resulting in the weakening of local governments and civil society structures, which have lost any capacities they had acquired in the past to actually exercise democratic control and regulation over the running of

²¹ The highly technocratic model of public service governance that prevailed since the II World War until the public sector reforms started in the 1980s (Dryzek, 1997). This technocratic model has not disappeared and is rather in confrontation with the model that Dryzek termed "economic rationalism", which is centre on market principles (and therefore, following other authors, it could be better termed "chrematistic" or "free-market rationalism" on this, see Martínez Alier, 2002.)

²² Based on de- and re-regulation, liberalization, and privatization implemented since the 1980s.

essential public services.²³ This is a crucial problem, because good governance and the exercise of substantive citizenship rights imply social participation and democratic control over the decision-making process, in our case, decisions about how natural resources and essential services are to be governed, by whom, and for whom. Developing and replicating suitable alternatives to overcome the governance crisis will require radical changes in the form that multilateral institutions, aid agencies, and other key power holders approach this matter.

This is particularly relevant in addressing the situation of countries considered to be less developed, given that notions such as “governance”, “civil society”, and “citizenship” emerged from the specific historical experience of Western Europe and the US and their empirical reference may be completely absent in other societies. For instance, one of the most frequent images cast in the current mainstream debates on governance is that of a “partnership”. However, this “partnership” that is often presented as the hallmark of good governance, is usually very weak or simply missing in many countries that are characterized by a frail public sector with low capacity for regulation and law enforcement. Under such conditions civil society is often limited to a small social elite, while the bulk of society cannot afford to participate meaningfully in the social and political life or take part in the decision-making process (UN et. al., 1998; Sims and Butter, 2000).²⁴ In this type of context, the notion of “partnership” is meaningless, as the citizenry

²³ See for instance the final report of the PRINWASS Project, among other examples of how the policies promoting private sector expansion in the provision of water and sanitation services implemented since the late 1980s have contributed to the deepening governance crisis, including the now classical examples of Cochabamba in Bolivia, and Tucumán and Buenos Aires in Argentina (Castro, 2004).

²⁴ This problem of social participation also touches on another aspect of the problem that would require a more extensive and deep treatment that we cannot offer here. Taking into account some of the excellent comments received from our readers on this issue, we wish to point out briefly that we do not reify the importance of social participation. That is, social participation, for instance citizen mobilization to request changes in water policy, is not sufficient given that a number of elements required for such mobilization to succeed in contributing to the democratization of the governance of water and water services are often missing. For instance, citizens need access to reliable and up-to-date information and knowledge about how aquatic ecosystems and water services work, and also need the support of institutions that guarantee the effective protection of people’s rights, but with few exceptions these items are mostly unavailable to common citizens.

has no capacity to exercise social control over public or private actors in charge of the water management. As a result, citizens are often defenceless against both environmental and anthropogenic risks and hazards (McGranahan et. al., 2001), though to be fair this situation is by no means limited to the countries considered to be less developed (Beck, 1992, 1998; Harvey, 1996; Guha and Martínez Alier, 1997).²⁵

Moreover, though water governance is closely linked with issues of overall societal governance, the interrelationship between the two can adopt very different forms. On the one hand, for instance, a democratic and participatory system of governance at the national level does not guarantee that water, and ecological issues at large, will be efficiently managed. On the other hand, it is well known that sound and efficient water management systems can be perfectly developed and sustained in the context of highly authoritarian and undemocratic political situations.²⁶ Therefore, the increasing consensus around the crucial importance of adopting democratic, “good governance” practices in relation to water, based on meaningful citizen involvement and transparency, is not the result of an empirically proven model, but is rather derived from a complex array of factors including normative preferences and social struggles for the democratization of decision-making processes. This has very important implications for policy, and the aim of this document is fostering a wide debate on this topic.

²⁵ For examples of the social and political confrontations arising from this chronic weakness of the state in developing countries to monitor and regulate water and sanitation services see Castro and Laurie (2004).

²⁶ These issues are well-known to social scientists and historians (for example, see Peet, 1985; Worster, 1985). More recently, a report based on the experience of the multinational water companies operating worldwide has confirmed this complex interaction between the technical-administrative efficiency and democracy in water governance (GWP, 2003).

2. 2. Governance and citizenship: closing remarks

Although finding common ground for understanding the key political processes underpinning institutional development in water issues would be helpful, this cannot be achieved by blurring the existing confrontations between competing models of governance and citizenship. Therefore, we do not argue in favour of some eclectic understanding of these processes, but contrariwise we propose that the debate must be conducted by uncovering the underlying confrontations and clearly identifying the issues at stake. In this connection, we believe that the following definition of governance provides useful tools to think about these ongoing confrontations between social actors defending rival sets of ends, values, and means in relation to collective affairs, confrontations that take place in a given institutional context and in turn also inform the very process of institutional development:

The core of governance has to do with determining what ends and values should be chosen and the means by which those ends and values should be pursued, i.e. the direction of the social unit, e.g. society, community or organization. Governance includes activities such as efforts to influence the social construction of shared beliefs about reality; the creation of identities and institutions; the allocation and regulation of rights and obligations among interested parties; and the distribution of economic means and welfare services. Governance, in other words, is the shaping and sustaining of the arrangements of authority and power within which actors make decisions and frame policies that are binding on individual and collective actors within different territorial bounds, such as those of the state, county and municipality (Hanf and Jansen, 1998: 3).

Needless to say, we are not proposing here a prescriptive approach to the problem. The definition by political actors of the ends and values and of the means to pursue these ends and values does not happen in the vacuum and is rather influenced by structural conditions. As already stated, the actors of the governance complex constitute a highly asymmetric and evolving structure based in power and knowledge. In relation to water, this is expressed in concrete policy decisions,

such as constitutional reforms to change the status of water from public to private good or institutional innovations to create water rights based primarily on market principles. These institutional developments are grounded on certain values and aim to achieve specific aims which often express the interests of particular economic and political actors, even when they are presented as reflecting the “general interest” of the citizenry. Moreover, the evidence shows that very frequently these policies are implemented with disregard for the opinions and preferences of the citizens, which continues to fuel recurrent conflicts in different areas of water policy, particularly but not only in the countries considered to be less developed. The appalling conditions of water inequality described in the first section are the best example of these contradictions: in general, water inequality and poverty are not the result of technical failure but are mainly grounded on protracted socio-economic and political processes that reproduce the conditions of socio-economic and political inequality.

Summing up, fostering conditions of “good governance” and substantive citizenship is essential for enabling the institutional development needed to achieve the goals of the international community to completely eradicate water poverty and inequality by 2025. This gigantic task²⁷ could only be successfully completed through the coordinated action of all the relevant actors from the local to the global level, a kind of social force that in matters of essential human needs such as water and sanitation, food security, or environmental and public health is still weak and largely underdeveloped. Developing this social force would require a very high level of balanced coordination to overcome the asymmetries of knowledge and power that underpin the existing

²⁷ In 2000 it was estimated that achieving the goals of halving the world population without access to safe water by 2015 required connecting daily 200,000 people; for sanitation the figure was 400,000 people daily. Some experts expressed the opinion that these goals were technically unfeasible from the start, and the emerging evidence suggests that sadly perhaps the sceptics are right: a report by the World Health Organization published in 2005 shows that progress is slower than expected and that now the currently the number of people to be connected daily to water supply systems has risen to 275,000 per day (WHO, 2005: 27).

conditions of structural inequality. However, these requirements of “good governance” will demand far-reaching and radical changes in the prevailing policy frameworks in order to achieve successful outcomes, and we hope that this document can make a contribution towards this end.

3. Institutional arrangements

Let us remind ourselves of the initial questions that we posed at the start regarding the institutional dimension. We aimed to propose for open debate the following:

- Which institutional arrangements have been or can be identified as required for achieving the goals of the international community for water issues (i.e. universal access to essential water and sanitation; sustainability; food security; adequate management of water risks, etc.)?
- Which political processes –and in what conditions– can contribute towards the successful development of such institutional arrangements? And which ones would rather hinder the sought development?

We derived these questions from premises developed in the course of our research efforts.

It is also worth reminding here three of these premises listed at the beginning:

“1) institutional development is part and parcel of the wider process of development, which is multidimensional and encompasses social, economic-financial, political, institutional, technological, cultural, and ecological aspects; [...]

5) water institutions are both the result and the vehicle of such political processes, which inform institutional change and development in relation to water;

6) political processes are essentially about exercising power and can be better understood as (but not reduced to) an ongoing confrontation between rival political projects which is staged by rival political actors. The processes of governance and citizenship are essential components of these wider political processes”.

The aim of this section is not to develop in depth the answers to these questions here or to fully discuss the consequences derived from these premises, but only to provide a framework for debate on these issues. As already stated, one of our main points of departure is the assumption that the “water crisis” is multidimensional, but that the main explanatory factors must be sought in the socio-economic, political, and institutional dimensions.

In this regard, a first step would be to review the notion of “institution”, which is often taken for granted but is also subject to diverse and even contradictory definitions. Some authors have defined water institutions as “rules that together describe action situations, delineate action sets, provide incentives and determine outcomes both in individual and collective decisions related to water development, allocation, use and management” (Bromley, 1989; see also North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990). More broadly, it has been argued that institutions have subjective and objective characteristics,²⁸ and there is a recognition even among neo-classical economists that history matters because institutions are “path dependent”, given that their present status and future direction cannot be divorced from their earlier course and past history (North, 1990).²⁹

There are, however, fundamental differences in the understanding of institutions, what their main characteristics and functions are, and how they are developed and sustained. In particular, in relation to public policy debates there is a tendency towards adopting technocratic, apolitical approaches that fail to grasp the essential interrelation between institutional development and political processes such as governance and citizenship. For instance, a recent evaluation of water institutions commissioned by the World Bank argued that

The major thrust of institutional reforms within the water sector is to enhance the functional capabilities, operational strength, and institutional readiness to handle water

²⁸ It has been said that institutions are subjective in origin and operation but objective in their manifestation and impact (Hodgson, 1998). Also, it has been argued that their subjective nature is manifested as a “belief system” (Veblen, 1919), as “behavioral habits” (Commons, 1934), as a “mental construct”, as the “subjective model” of individuals (North, 1990), and as “artifacts” that think and act through the human medium (Douglas, 1986; Stein, 1997; Ostrom, 1999).

²⁹ Although the crucial importance of history for understanding social processes such as institutional development has been always a fundamental premise in the social sciences, since the late nineteenth century neoclassical economists built their theories on premises that largely rejected the consideration of historical factors. The neoclassical paradigm encompasses a number of different theories, which include some influential versions developed in the late twentieth century such as Milton Friedmann’s Monetarism in the 1960s and the different forms of New Institutional Economics in the 1980s and 1990s, including the work of North and others. This tradition tends to reject the role of historical explanation and to address intellectual problems as timeless, a hodiecentric approach that has been exported successfully to the other social sciences, particularly politics and sociology (Calhoun, 2002: 295, 332-3; Goudsblom, 1977: 168).

challenges both at present and in the future. Given this thrust, the main objectives of institutional initiatives are rather transparent. These objectives are to: make water as an economic good, strengthen allocation capabilities, increase the reliance on market forces, revive the payment culture, ensure financial self-sufficiency, promote decentralized decision structure, and encourage the adoption of modern technology and information inputs (Saleth and Dinar, 1999: 36).

After the discussion presented in previous pages, even a superficial reading of this statement would not fail to elicit a few basic questions: what are the values on which these objectives are grounded? What are the ends that these objectives seek to attain? And, who decides that these are the main objectives for institutional reform in water issues? How is this decision taken? How do (do they) citizens participate in the identification of these objectives? In short, what understanding of governance and citizenship is informing this model of institutional development for water issues? Is it good governance?

The technocratic language of the study tends to suggest that these objectives are politically and value neutral, and in fact the main dimensions considered are the legal, policy, and administrative. However, let us consider one of the objectives proposed, to make water an economic good.³⁰ As already mentioned the conceptualization of water as a public, social or economic good is grounded on very different understandings of how society should be organized, and on rival value systems and political preferences in ongoing confrontation. In many cases, introducing economic institutions for transforming “water” into an economic good implies changing its present status of public or common good, but there is little evidence that market or quasi market solutions are fitted for this task (NRC, 2001: 36). For instance, in the most diverse cultural and political traditions, water for essential human uses has been historically awarded

primarily the status of public good, one that is available with independence of the individual payment capacity of the users, and therefore has been “invariably a public sector activity” (Roth, 1987: 230). Water for these uses has normally been provided through some sort of public arrangement whether be municipal aqueducts, public fountains, or common faucets, especially in the case of urban concentrations. However, from the perspective of neoclassical economists, there is no particular reason why water should continue to be considered a public good and be excluded from the market for ever (Roth, 1987: 240-2; Triche, 1990: 4). In this connection, North and Thomas argued that public goods such as water and air are —together with communal forms of property— the remains of ancient (anachronistic) institutions evolved in times of plenty, and they continue to exist mainly because of the high cost and imperfection of the available techniques to charge for them and excluding the free riders (North and Thomas 1973: 5-7). According to these authors, technological and social change may bring about the end of public goods as such and pave the way for private provision, which in this perspective is inherently more efficient than public or community arrangements. These arguments are familiar for those engaged in current debates about water policy, and they provide the theoretical framework for studies on water institutions such as Saleth and Dinar’s.

The consideration of these arguments in the context of this section is justified because of the significant influence that this approach to institutional problems continues to have after helping to shape water policy worldwide during almost three decades. As mentioned in earlier sections, much of the institutional reforms implemented in recent decades have had little relationship with water, or more widely with ecological issues, but are the result of radical

³⁰ There is also a problem of overgeneralization in the analysis presented in this report, as “water” is discussed as an undifferentiated, abstract, entity. It is not the same to discuss water for essential human use, as envisaged in the Millennium Development Goals, than discussing water used for businesses such as the tourism industry or agro-

transformations in the power configurations that structure the global system of governance. The implication in the analysis that transforming water into an economic good and making water management more reliant on market mechanisms must be among the key institutional objectives is not grounded in knowledge about how aquatic ecosystems work nor about how social systems work. It is grounded on a particular understanding of one sub-dimension of social activity, the economic sub-dimension of market exchanges in the context of a capitalist economy, and this knowledge is transposed to explain how our institutions for managing complex ecosystems and even more complex social systems should be developed.

We do not wish to over react to the work of the neo-institutional economists quoted above, but are using this example to illustrate the underlying confrontations between rival understandings and political models that contribute to shaping institutional development in relation to water. We cannot develop this argument in more detail here, as the main aim of this document is to open the debate and foster dialogue that allows the meaningful participation of all actors involved, but particularly of those who are normally excluded from this debate. In this regard, it is worth recalling the fact that despite the predictions by neoclassical economists about the future demise of non-market institutional arrangements in water management, public and community institutional forms have persisted even in the core centres of the western democracies. For instance, Dutch Water Boards have been in existence from the twelfth century onwards and they were in fact the first Dutch political institutions created (Jaspers, 2003). Similarly, Ostrom has studied the successful coexistence of common pool institutional arrangements both in the context of modern economies as well as in poor countries (Ostrom, 1990). This warns us against the assumption that the technocratic models for institutional reform often put forward in current debates may be

businesses. For a more detailed discussion of the different functions of water and how these are linked with different value systems, see EUWATER, 2005.

successfully implemented with disregard for existing institutional arrangements. The evidence from recent research shows how in a large number of cases the implementation of technocratic institutional reforms has tended to ignore the existence of well-developed indigenous institutional arrangements for water management, which has led to recurrent failure and contributed to worsening existing problems or even creating new ones (e.g. Bauer, 2004; Boelens and Hoogendam, 2002).

On the positive side, although the types and perspectives in institutional water arrangements are vast and vary between countries, there are similar patterns that can be observed in relation to current processes of institutional development. In particular, in many countries it can be observed that there is a transition from a situation of exclusion of users and citizens from the activities of decision making and monitoring, to a new situation characterized by the promotion of “participatory” forms of water management. For instance, in many cases disadvantaged local communities are now expected to work in partnership with agricultural, industrial, forestry, governmental, and environmental groups. In order to favour participatory water management the state has often promoted the creation of institutions at different levels, like river basin councils, catchment area agencies, river basin commissions and committees, technical committees for aquifer management, among other examples. There are excellent examples of successful institutional development driven by cooperation and participatory governance, some of which will be presented at the Forum. However, in comparative terms successful and sustainable examples of democratic and participatory management in relation to institutional development in water issues are still a minority and the obstacles for effective citizen participation continue to weaken the capacity for attaining the development goals of the international community.

However, going back to our starting questions and premises, the sustainability of these and other institutional forms will depend on the key political processes of governance and citizenship discussed earlier. In particular, we are interested in promoting debate about which forms should these political processes take in order to promote institutional arrangements grounded on the principles of sustainability and social justice in relation to water.

Conclusions

As already explained in several passages of this text, the key objective of this document is to foster a discussion that gives the political dimension a central place in debate over institutional development in relation to water. In doing so, we have chosen two political processes that we consider to be crucial, those of governance and citizenship, though we acknowledge that these processes are neither the only ones that must be considered nor do we give them a higher value over the others. However, the analysis of these two processes in relation to the water institutions provides a way into the debate that, on the one hand, allows the creation of a common platform based on a language shared by the actors that we aim to incorporate in the discussion. On the other hand, this approach also allows provides an excellent example of the social and political contradictions and confrontations that underscore the water crisis, given that it is also clear that the notion of shared language is merely a mirage owing to the deep divergences in the meanings, values, and normative preferences characterizing the actors participating in water management. In particular, we have reviewed the contradiction between idealized versions of governance, which are based on the assumption of the existence of symmetric power relations and access to knowledge and information between the actors, which does not exist in practice. As it has been previously discussed, the reforms implemented during the last two decades in the water institutions have often worsened such asymmetries in power relations and in the conditions of access to knowledge and information, owing to the fact that despite the use of a rhetoric of participation and democratization, in practice they have contributed to the worsening imbalance of the fragile equilibrium between the actors, such as between the large private water companies, the

international financial institutions, the national governments, on one side, and local authorities, communities, citizen groups, civil society organizations, indigenous and peasant groups, among other actors, on the other side. The results have not been positive, and after a long series of institutional failures and increasing political confrontations, we arrive at the Fourth World Water Forum with a great opportunity to objectively examine the situation in the light of the goals adopted by the international community in relation to water. This will require opening the dialogue to the different social and political actors, and eventually setting in motion the political processes that may allow the radical transformation of those conditions that continue to determine the existence of inexcusable degrees of inequality and poverty in relation to water.

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