



Conference Report

International Workshop on Regional Water Transfer within an Integrated Water Resources Management Perspective

Kalmar, Sweden, 20-23 August, 2000

The University of Kalmar, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm International Water Institute and the Third World Centre for Water Management, convened an International Workshop on Regional Water Transfer within an Integrated Water Resources Management Perspective, in Kalmar, Sweden, 20-23 August, 2000. The workshop was sponsored by IIT Industries, Sweden. The objective of the meeting was to review the complexities and challenges of different alternatives for inter- and intra-basin water transfer at the national and regional levels. Water abstractions from international rivers and water supply from one country to another by diversion schemes and by innovative technological means (e.g. rubber bags), were also analysed. Economic, technological, institutional, social, and environmental implications of current and proposed large-scale water transfer schemes were discussed in depth.

Besides from the above mentioned institutions, participants from the International Water Resources Association and Global International Water Assessment; Universities of Jerusalem, Linköping, Kalmar, Helsinki and Denmark; Centre for Water Problems of China, Ministry of Water Resources of India and Ethiopia, Southeastern Anatolia Project Regional Administration, Turkey, and Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, Brazil, attended the Conference. Private sector companies from Sweden and Norway were also present.

It was generally agreed that the debate about water diversion has become a heated issue, both nationally and internationally. Although numerous water transfer projects have already been made in many developed and developing countries, currently an increasingly growing resistance for further developments of this kind can be noted. The people who live in the water-abundant areas are becoming increasingly more reluctant and disturbed about proposals to divert part of “their water” to water-scarce another regions, even when the projects promote economic development, poverty alleviation and environmental protection.

Examples of water transfer in South Africa, China and Brazil were presented, as well as the Sardar Sarovar Project in India, the Southeastern Anatolia Project in Turkey, the Nile River initiative, and water resources management in the Jordan River region. Norwegian technology for water transfer in Turkey represented a new approach for water transfer.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the technical issues were not considered by the participants as the main problems for the implementation of the projects. On the contrary, environmental and social issues have become the main constraints for the acceptance and the implementation of the projects. Coordination, information, communication and even ethics and

credibility, seem to have become the main challenges for the governments proposing new water-transfer projects.

Because of this new opposition to water-transfer schemes, the governmental institutions would have to develop innovative strategies to convince the population (and more recently the national and the international media) that specific water transfer projects represent the most efficient alternative available, and that they are both socially and environmentally acceptable.

Effective communication with the affected population has become an essential component of the planning and implementation of such projects. Governmental strategies should include provision of reliable and timely information to the population as to why certain water transfer schemes have been selected over other options available (e.g. demand management). Their social and environmental impacts have to be carefully assessed, and appropriate cost-effective mitigation measures have to be identified. In order to assure the success of the projects, it is also essential to identify which institutions, laws and policies would favour or impede the implementation of water transfer strategies. Last, but not least, considerations must be given to various trade-offs, which must be considered in the decisions-making process.

The general global view at present appears to be that first water must be used in an efficient manner for the development of the regions, with appropriate considerations of overall economic, social, institutional and environmental consequences. New projects should be considered only after water use efficiencies and demand management practices have been taken into account.

The Kalmar workshop was an integrated, multi-disciplinary attempt to review the current status and need of interregional water transfer, within an overall framework of integrated water resources management constructively and objectively. The papers presented at this workshop will shortly be published by the Royal Institute of Technology.

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