



Learning Alliance Briefing Note 14: Water governance for integrated urban water management (draft)

*Prepared by Carmen da Silva, Alistair Sutherland and
Colin Green*

Introduction

Integrated Urban Water Management (IUWM) is challenging because it implicitly requires an improvement in governance, especially at the city level, spanning several traditionally separate sub-sectors or functions of government and civil society. The aim of this briefing note is to outline the concept of water governance and its importance to implementing IUWM.

Governance can be described as the exercise of authority and legitimate influence in the management of a city's water and water-related affairs at all levels of decision-making. This includes the complex mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which stakeholders articulate their interests, mediate their differences, and exercise their legal rights and obligations with respect to water management.

This modification of a generic UNDP definition sees governance as being made up of two elements: mechanisms and processes on the one hand, and structures or institutions on the other. These two elements are closely linked because processes are largely articulated through institutions.

Governance is key to SWITCH (a project promoting integrated urban water management) since it aims to work with and through key stakeholders in the participating cities, encouraging and supporting them to do 'better' than they have in the past. Doing 'better' means several things: 1) making 'better' choices than in the past, 2) being more successful in implementing those choices, and 3) having better options to select from and implement. The first two challenges are central to improved water governance. The latter is mainly the responsibility of innovators (for example the researchers involved in SWITCH).

Doing things 'better'

By doing things 'better', we mean improving the means of deciding what to do and of implementing those decisions in terms of the improved delivery of services. Central to both the decision and the delivery processes are institutions, particularly those taking the form of an organisation such as a municipality or a water supply utility.

Doing "better" implies factors relating to cost-effectiveness, equity, inclusiveness, environmental quality and sustainability. Deciding and implementing

Governance is not synonymous with government. Rather, it is about how governments, institutions and social organizations interact with citizens when making decisions and implementing them. It is the process of decision making which determines how decisions are taken and who has the power, and in what capacity, to make decisions. It is also about who is held accountable for these decisions.

better IUWM requires a clear strategy and framework for multi-stakeholder engagement around a specific problem to be solved or opportunity to be addressed. Bringing stakeholder together should not mean working with all possible stakeholders at the same time and place: that is impractical. What is important is to understand which stakeholders are key to achieving a particular change towards better IUWM.

Within a city (and/or catchment) different aspects of water management may be represented by widely different relations between different stakeholder groups. While each stakeholder may have a specific responsibility or interest, cross-cutting issues such as flooding, drought and water resource management for example must be managed in an integrated way. If integration is absent the approach adopted in resolving one problem can simply make another aspect of water management more difficult.

SWITCH (like many other research projects) is proposing new approaches and technologies. To ensure that these are fully tested and put into practice and to find new and better ways of managing water in cities, SWITCH partners in each city need a well founded understanding of the formal and informal rules, the existing power relations and the context in which the proposed change is to be implemented. This requires exploring to what extent policies, legislation, power relations and processes external to the project provide room to implement the proposed solutions. Institutional mapping focused on specific technical innovations, together with a wider political context or stakeholder analysis, should provide this information.

Institutions and IUWM

Institutions are defined as systems of rules, either formal or informal, and those rules define the boundaries of any institution. For the purposes of water management, institutions are also likely to be organisations that have a recognised role in water management or which are able to clearly articulate their interest in water management.

Delivering IUWM is likely to involve either designing new institutions which suit the physical boundaries of the systems to be managed, or improving the cooperation or co-ordination between existing institutions. The former approach implies that it is both possible and acceptable to re-design institutions that will deliver enhanced integration. The latter approach requires existing institutions to learn how to, and commit to, achieving such coordinated outcomes. In this case, it also means that these institutions have to measure their success, in part, in terms of their ability to influence the actions of others, or to make agreed

changes in their own actions. The starting point for both approaches has to be the development of a local institutional map which identifies which institutions have the power to deliver, fund or otherwise influence the successful up-take of the different technical measures proposed in order to deliver IUWM. It focuses on the key actors, their interactions, where power is located, who has the ability to influence decisions, and who makes decisions.

'Good governance' is characterized by principles such as openness, participation, legitimacy, equity, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.

How is governance in the water sector linked to processes of social inclusion and exclusion? The answer to this question will vary between cities, largely depending on the extent to which the city residents are content with, concerned about, and able to influence (positively or negatively) water management. In cities where the majority of households are connected to centralised water supply and waste-water management systems which operate effectively and reliably, the extent of citizen engagement with water management issues is likely to be less widespread and intense. The issues may be around service charges, or water related risks such as flooding or rising/falling water tables posing risks to buildings and property values.

In cities where most households are connected, but the water supply is not reliable and/or waste-water is not well managed there will be much more citizen engagement, and issues of social exclusion will arise strongly if the problems are concentrated more in the poorer parts of the city. In the poorer cities, where most households are not connected to mains water and sanitation networks, issues of social exclusion are likely to be more important. Moreover, citizens are more directly involved in water management (or "mis-management"), and are likely to be negatively labelled (for example as polluters, illegal connectors, water vendors). In addition, in such cities there will be greater diversity in terms of sub-systems, institutional arrangements, and technical options for water management.

How is governance linked to City Learning Alliances (LAs) and multi-stakeholder involvement? The first point is that SWITCH City Learning Alliances (a type of multistakeholder platform also being promoted by SWITCH) are an institutional innovation aiming to enhance integration and innovation in water management. Where the learning alliances are stronger and have a broad-based membership which is actively engaged and committed to the vision of IUWM, then there will be more scope to engage with governance issues and processes. Where alliances have effective representation from marginalised stakeholders, the alliance may give these stakeholders a stronger voice and provide a means for more effective engagement with other more influential and central stakeholders on issues of concern. In a city where the alliance is less active and marginalised stakeholders are not represented, there will be more limited scope for engaging with governance issues.

Instead the focus may be more on discussion of technical and policy options or on future aspirations relating to technical integration and environmental sustainability.

Conclusion: addressing governance issues

In short, to deliver innovations that are applied by cities, attention to governance and institutional mapping must be key elements of the approach. Institutional mapping links technologies and issues around IUWM with the processes, structures and outcomes of decision-making known as governance. A local institutional map will identify which institutions can deliver on IUWM.

References and links

Green, C. Mapping the field: the landscapes of governance. 2007. SWITCH report [online] Available at www.switchurbanwater.eu

Green, C. 2007 Institutional arrangements and mapping for the governance of sustainable urban water management technologies: Mapping protocol and case study of Birmingham, England. SWITCH report [online] Available at www.switchurbanwater.eu

For more information please contact: John Butterworth IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (butterworth@irc.nl) who coordinates the learning alliance work-package within SWITCH, or the authors of this briefing note: Carmen Da Silva (dasilva@irc.nl), Alistair Sutherland at the University of Greenwich (a.j.sutherland@gre.ac.uk) and Colin Green at the University of Middlesex (C.Green@mdx.ac.uk).

SWITCH (Sustainable Water Management Improves Tomorrow's Cities' Health) is a research partnership supported by the European Community (Framework 6 Programme) and its partners www.switchurbanwater.eu/learningalliances