

SUMMARY: SAI Symposium 2014 – Urban Water Challenges Workshop – Discussion Portion

After the presentations, the panel took questions from the audience.

Farhana was asked to elaborate on ways to enable the substantial private investment for developing water distribution infrastructure while ensuring equitable access or accounting for the water needs of vulnerable populations.

Farhana emphasized that privatization isn't the only approach to addressing shortcomings in existing public authority approaches to meeting the water needs of a municipality. The goal should be to "change the entity that is inefficient or inept" to improve how water is managed and delivered. Public-private partnerships, public-public partnerships, and re-municipalisation can be pathways for achieving the goals. Privatization is not the only solution and has been shown to be detrimental to the urban poor across multiple cities

She included some points about accountability in her response: if a private entity withdraws, who is left to clean the mess? The public sector is more accountable to its location, as it cannot pack up and leave. There are opportunities to bolster and strengthen the public sector and think about expansion or provision of water services without privatizing or commoditization of water.

Peter pointed out that "water is a commodity" The issue of public or private water is that of a "*white cat or black cat*" The question of organizational structure is not as important as *can it catch the mice?* If an organization can provide successful water service and leadership, then the private/public status of that organization isn't an issue. There are stories of failure, but also success: private water in Manila is working well. He expressed that the major outcome from this "public vs. private" debate is that it encourages bureaucracy to avoid solving the problem.

The next question asked about operationalization of trust between provinces in Pakistan. Afreen discussed that the roots of mistrust between Sindh and Punjab pre-date independence. Tensions over water rights in these provinces can be traced to the Indus Water Treaty (1960s). There is a need to build greater ties between the provinces to enable opportunities to build trust, but how we go about doing that is really unclear.

Jim Wescoat expressed that there are still questions of how to implement fiscal federalism. Briefly mentioned Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnURM), a multi-year funding scheme to improve infrastructure in cities in India, expressing that even with a mechanism designed to funnel funds directly to the cities, states still constrain the access to funding. Another experiment to watch is WASMO in Gujarat, India, a community based water management organization, but it was organized as a special purpose vehicle of the Government of Gujarat. There are examples of creative experiments for addressing water management in cities and communities with different types and involvements of higher levels of government that need to be studied and compared.

Farhana pointed out that water and sanitation are intrinsically linked in urban environments. Asia as a whole doesn't have good treaties that address these issues. The upstream-downstream dynamic exemplifies some of these problems: India complains about China's upstream withdrawals from the Brahmaputra, and Bangladesh complains about India's upstream dams on 52 rivers.

Farhana answered a question about how do we operationalize a right to water with a call for institutional changes. "How do we enable people to have spaces to have claims and have institutions respond to that?" Cross-class alliances and ways to change the structure are needed. The major issues

are will and politics, not money. The agents of change for political will and political dynamics are collectively driven. Problems at the slum scale cannot be fully solved at the slum scale; we require more than the poor and vulnerable collectivizing.

Shafik added a question of his own: How do you operationalize this? Its not a question of is water a property or right. We want knowledge that can be operationalized with measurable outcomes.

Another participant used an anecdote where a group of students visited a settlement in Delhi that was having water delivery problems, and the student queries and interviews -- the community members and the current government officials -- provided the political impetus to fix the problem. Trust is related to human agency.

Another question was about scale: what can be done at an individual/farmer scale? Is that a starting point? Can there be a significant or relevant impact at this scale?

Peter responded that agriculture outside of cities uses the largest portion of available water, and the problems of water allocations for agricultural use or for cities creates a tension that can be managed with political agreements or on a market basis. In irrigation, there are great opportunities for reducing water usage with technology, but modern technology is for large scale agriculture, and is operationalized on a larger scale than a single family farmer.

Afreen pointed out that in Pakistan irrigation is performed in highly inefficient ways. There is no incentive for farmers to become more efficient. Moving to drip irrigation requires money. Those who have the money also have ample water. Those who would do not have access to ample water do not have the capital to deploy such systems. The problem then again enters the realm of politics: the existing politics and power structures dictate our water problems. How do we address these when the people who control the land and water are the people who control the politics and power?

Jim discussed that rainwater harvesting (an individual level activity) is being explored in different contexts, but while it is successful in some villages in Rajasthan, as it can supplement cisterns, it can't make a significant dent for urban water supply. And, drainage is an issue that needs to be addressed as urbanization increases. Small scale or distributed drainage systems won't meet the needs of all cities.

Projected water demands are doubling. The capacity to deliver that amount of
Are there any engineering solutions to these problems? If these growth demands continue, will we remain in water crisis mode?

Peter responded that many of the cities with doubling demand aren't actually meeting 50% of the current need, and part of the challenge is increasing the capacity to meet future needs of 100% of the population. He also pointed out that the political process works through logrolling - the trading of favors between politicians and entities. Water on its own has "very little to negotiate away" but when we open up the problems then there is something in it for everybody. Afreen described linking water to food and energy to expand the water pie. Shafik discussed creating "tradable opportunities" and paraphrased Larry Susskind that in negotiation; an option needs to be "good for you and better for me." Trust is not enough, the political situation needs to be conducive to finding and enacting a solution.