Water Demand Management
Policy Brief No.5

Improving Water Demand Management

by Addressing Socioeconomic Inequalities and Power Asymmetries

The case of Yemen and Jordan

Efforts to conserve water by improving water demand management policies in the Middle East and North Africa are often slowed or even thwarted by a lack of political consensus and support for water demand management from key powerful stakeholders with vested interest in the status quo. This policy brief based on experience in Jordan and Yemen suggests ways to confront such socioeconomic inequalities slowing reform in the water sector. Suggested policy solutions employ an innovative approach, which analyzes power asymmetries amongst stakeholders and suggests various strategies for working within established power hierarchies and/or leveling the playing field.

This policy brief is based on an extensive collaborative research effort between the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Canadian International development Agency (CIDA).

The Problem: Power and Water Demand Management

While there is evidence of greater movement towards water demand management (WDM) in the Middle East and North Africa, the political will required to address the physical and social drivers of water scarcity is still lacking. The WaDImena project has identified that socioeconomic inequalities amongst stakeholders and power asymmetries are recurring themes which require greater consideration. In-depth stakeholder analysis applied to the water sectors of Jordan and Yemen clearly reveals just how vested interests can block water policy reform. In the Yemen case, there is a strong link showing that those parties who are most able to influence the implementation of WDM are also the most strongly opposed to it. Likewise, the concerned ministries, NGOs and donor organisations that support the implementation of WDM are considerably less powerful. The results in the Jordan case are slightly more complex—with pro WDM groups benefiting from the support of considerably high levels of power.

Policy Options for Improving Socioeconomic Inequalities

Working with Socioeconomic Inequalities

Create positive-sum outcomes. This approach relies on the logic that efforts contradicting the interests of the powerful stakeholders are likely to be resisted, while efforts meeting their interests will be supported. The key to this approach is in identifying projects beneficial to the weaker side that are also

beneficial to the stronger side, hence the 'win-win'.
Encourage transformation. This approach is based on the idea that the powerful may be persuaded to broaden existing arrangements to meet the interests of the weaker, primarily through appeals to their *leadership*.

Challenging Socioeconomic Inequalities

Level the players. Building up the capacity of the weaker side increases their legitimacy, and therefore, their bargaining power. Policy reform is facilitated when the agency promoting it has credibility from the people and other institutions to shore up its formal (if weak) authority.

Level the playing field. Asymmetries in power and influence between stakeholders serve to perpetuate the uneven 'playing field'. A more equitable regulatory context and greater participation leads to more sustainable arrangements.

Confronting Power in the Water Sectors of Yemen and Jordan

The most relevant players may be identified through an in-depth stakeholder analysis, which goes beyond listing the stakeholders, and plots their relative power against their level support for WDM. The method shows that some groups may be considered 'crossover groups', for both their support and resistance to WDM measures. These groups are seen as key to any conciliatory or consensus-building initiatives aimed at confronting power asymmetry.

Lessons from Yemen

In the Yemen case, the analysis shows the large landowners and Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation are powerful stakeholders reluctant to WDM measures. Small farmers, WUAs and researchers may all support WDM implementation, but hold relatively little influence. The National Water Resources Authority, Ministry of Local Administration and manufacturing interests have been identified as key 'crossover groups' to whom consensus-building roles may be given. Based on WaDImena studies, the way forward for WDM in Yemen includes:

- *Creation of positive-sum outcomes*: rural-urban water transfers; encouragement of reflexive governance; and appropriate regulations and incentives.
- *Encouraging transformation*: reform of incentives for wealthy farmers; and improving inter-governmental relations.
- *Leveling the players*: building networks; empowering Water Users' Associations; maintaining local knowledge; and renewed pro-poor programmes.
- *Leveling the playing field*: improving equity impact; effective and wider-spread use of technology; and increased transparency.

Lessons from Jordan

In the Jordan case, stakeholder analysis shows that farmers in the Jordan River Valley and the Higher Agricultural Council are resistant to WDM measures, and are much more influential than the NGOs and Ministry of Environment which support WDM. The important 'crossover groups' include the Royal Committee, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. Based on WaDImena studies, the way forward for WDM in Jordan includes:

- *Creation of positive-sum outcomes*: appropriate use of technology (where both land and water are limiting factors); and the creation rural-urban water transfers.
- *Encouraging transformation*: from the Royal Court downwards; and through more effective communication amongst stakeholders.
- *Leveling the players*: improving governance of institutions; using more effective WDM mechanisms and improving awareness levels.
- *Leveling the playing field*: implementing decision-support systems; and improved lawmaking and enforcement.

Conclusion: Potential Effective Policy Options

Rather than favouring one approach over another, it is suggested that a strategic mix of approaches over the long term stand the best chance of success. A well thought-out strategy should employ a mix of approaches designed to both work with and challenge socioeconomic inequalities and power asymmetries. Such a strategy would consider the most relevant forms of power to apply at each stage in the water policy reform process, and the most suitable combination of projects. The mix may be broken down into a number of general considerations and actionable recommendations:

Share lessons learned. Essentially, all of the solutions identified in either the Jordan or Yemen contexts are applicable in both national contexts. This suggests that there is merit in cross-fertilisation.

Establish dialogue platforms. Powerful groups opposed to WDM implementation may be influenced to discuss WDM if called upon by groups seen to be relatively neutral on the issue. Dialogue platforms convened and facilitated by the 'crossover groups' could contribute to efforts on other fronts, and should be based on traditional conflict-resolution practices.

Strengthening negotiations capacity. Building up the negotiations skills of WUAs, farmers' groups and water authorities is perhaps the most effective way of confronting power asymmetry. Negotiations support at the national level may contribute to ongoing discussions with neighbouring states (e.g. over the Yarmouk River and Disi Aquifer).

Capitalise on 'change moments'. Reforming policy during or immediately in the wake of a sudden event is much easier than during 'normal' times, when views and policies are entrenched and most likely unchangeable.

Think long-term. There are at least two very good reasons for sustained donor commitment in supporting WDM: a) change occurs slowly, and a long-term perspective on progress would allow for the accomplishments that have built up over the years and b) short or even medium-term commitment

compromises donor intentions from the outset. Long-term commitment to WDM and other progressive water management policy relieve the actors from the stresses of normal funding cycles and – most importantly – demonstrate to the beneficiaries that they also may plan for the long term.

WATER DEMAND MANAGEMENT MEANS…

MAKING THE MOST OF THE WATER WE HAVE

We can do that by moderating and managing the demand for fresh water.

- First, ensure fair access to sustainable water supply, as well as, responsible water use.
- Second, reduce the amount of fresh water we all use.
- Third, keep the water we all use as clean as possible.

Making the most of the water we have calls for effective policy as much as efficient technology. It means governing the demand for good quality water through policies that encourage or enforce efficient and equitable water use — either by changing the way water is used or by changing the task to use less water. Water policy can also mandate reducing the loss of quantity or quality of water as it flows, and ensuring security of supply in times of water shortage.

In short, WDM requires a new way of thinking about water: it is a strategy for social innovation, requiring that we examine not just the technical and economic issues, but also the personal and political choices leading to prudent and responsible decisions.