



## Innovation Brief

on International Development Services

### *Facilitating Pragmatic River Basin Development and Management: Towards a Practical Way Forward*

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#### **The problem**

***In many developing countries implementation of "Integrated Water Resources Management" (IWRM) is stalled, and frustration is rising. This Innovation Brief proposes a practical way forward: "Pragmatic River Basin Development and Management" (PRBDM). Euroconsult Mott MacDonald is prepared to collaborate with governments, development partners and basin stakeholders to implement this concrete and practical approach for optimizing the benefits of effective river basin management.***

A few years ago several participants in a workshop on water management in India protested that "western" consultants and development organizations kept developing formal legal and "integrated" frameworks for river basin management. Meanwhile, most basin residents continue to be unaware of the laws and regulations adopted. A representative of one NGO active in a river basin in southern India described their "more practical approach", which was, first, to identify an important water problem along the river. This happened to be the conflict over water quality between farmers, shrimp producers and tanners. They focused on facilitating and implementing negotiated agreements between stakeholders. Their plan was to move gradually and incrementally on to other issues over time.

In other countries comprehensive frameworks for integrated management of river basins die in parliaments or planning units because of resistance by politically powerful interests or the inability of countries to implement fully integrated approaches, due to lack of water control infrastructure, budgets or

forums that can combine diverse stakeholder representatives into real decision-making bodies.

The Global Water Partnership defines Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as a process that "promotes the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems." Although the GWP has correctly noted that IWRM is a process, many donors, countries and experts have tried to adopt IWRM as an integrated and comprehensive package that will simultaneously maximize efficiency, equity and environmental sustainability.

River basins in many developing countries are characterized by: a lack of water control structures, water resources that are either under-developed or fully allocated, vested interests of the powerful, weak formal institutions, lack of rule of law, and stakeholders with basic needs for water who lack access or rights to water and lack political choice or even voice. Within such environments how can integrated management principles based on water allocation and rights, demand management, water measurement, cost recovery, polluter pays, regulation of water quality, etc. be implemented within a comprehensive framework? The inability or unwillingness of many countries to adopt and implement comprehensive IWRM frameworks suggests that a different approach is needed.

#### **A More Practical Approach**

We believe that a more practical approach can be taken to develop and manage river basins. Rather

than attempting to adopt an integrated and comprehensive IWRM package and assume stakeholders are able to participate fully and equitably, we suggest an alternative process that is more practical, participatory and based on local needs and circumstances. We call this practical approach “Pragmatic River Basin Development and Management” (PRBDM).

A critical feature of PRBDM is an emphasis on incremental decision-making, problem solving, experimentation, learning, skills development, performance assessment, negotiation, and gradual institutional development. PRBDM is guided by an IWRM framework but does not perceive IWRM as a blueprint to be implemented all at once.

### To implement PRBDM we suggest the following 7 Steps:

#### **Step 1. Basin physio-technical situation assessment**

Step 1 involves a basin situation assessment, which is based on IWRM principles and designed to enable people to understand what are the key constraints and opportunities on the basin, and what are the interactions among these – so that, if policy makers or managers propose a solution to a serious problem, they can also assess what the implications will be for other uses and users in the basin. This assessment will include the current situation and trends in water resources supply and use, land use, agriculture and the environment. This needs to be done within an IWRM framework by local professionals with technical support as needed from outside. It should be based on existing data, if possible, with complementary ground-truthing as needed. The results of Step 1 will be used to inform Step 2.

#### **Step 2. Social and institutional assessment**

Step 2 involves a social and institutional assessment to create understandings of the basic social and economic status of people in the basin, the range of formal and informal institutions, power relations, social networks, etc., and what peoples’ perceptions are of water-related problems and opportunities and how they rank them. This will include sample surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and use of various social marketing and

marketing research tools. This work will be done by local professionals with technical support as needed. The findings emerging from Step 1 will be tested and validated as part of this process.

The results of the social assessment will be critical in identifying key stakeholders and their interests and potential forums for consultation. People will also be asked their views on what kinds of existing forums and institutions are needed to encourage stakeholder participation in future basin decision-making. Experience suggests that there are often local- level informal organizations not directly associated with water that can be used to mobilize stakeholders to address river basin management issues, complementing formal institutions such as local governments. The idea is to combine the social, institutional and perceptions mapping exercise with an early assessment of responses to the key findings from Steps 1 and 2. The findings will provide a basis for planners and policy makers to develop an approach to the rest of the process.

#### **Step 3. Visualize the future and prioritize solutions**

After the assessments in Steps 1 and 2 are completed, presented and discussed, stakeholder representatives should be facilitated to visualize what conditions in the basin will be like in 10 to 15 years—if no reforms or development interventions occur. This should include envisioning how stakeholders are likely to be affected if no actions are taken to influence the changes expected in the basin. And it should include identifying a short list of priority implementable options. This doesn’t have to be an exact science. It is only a knowledge-based approximation of likely changes.

Stakeholder representatives will come together in local forums to discuss the results of assessments and agree on general goals and principles of river basin management. Findings from these local forums can be carried to higher level forums by representatives. The principles of IWRM can be espoused as a general approach. As visualized changes in the basin and their effects on people and the environment are discussed, facilitators should encourage stakeholders to identify and prioritize actions that can and should be taken to preserve resources and support sustainable development in

the river basin. In the early stages it is critical to choose practical problems that can be solved using existing resources—to demonstrate the power of PRBDM. This could include agreements for water allocation between different sectors, protection against deforestation, limitations on pollution-generating practices, flushing lower reaches of the basin, etc. Awareness raising should always be part of the programme. Experts should be involved to ensure that priority problems and their assumed actions are valid. The forums should propose which stakeholders will play what roles.

#### **Step 4. Agree, develop and implement practical, short-term plans**

Consistent with priorities agreed upon in the stakeholder forums, a sub-set of stakeholder representatives, assisted by experts and planners, should then prepare a simple, short-term plan of practical steps to solve the initial problem(s) identified. This should include assignment of responsibilities, a timeline with milestones, and provision for monitoring. Parallel to this, planning and consultations should continue in order to identify the next priority issue and make plans to address it. In other words, a continuous dialogue and set of actions, building on previous accomplishments, should accumulate into measurable improvements in the river basin.

#### **Step 5. Negotiate agreements for existing disputes or decisions**

Much of the progress that needs to be made in river basins in developing countries requires political decisions, both by formal politicians and between stakeholders. In many river basins some water-related disputes will need to be settled or moderated before further progress in development or management can be made. Negotiations may be needed between parties involved in agreements over service provision, protection of resources, resource use regulations, and so on. It is critical to establish forums and procedures that basin stakeholders accept as legitimate for resolving disputes and making decisions. This should be an organic process, building on the stakeholders' own wishes, not impositions from outside.

#### **Step 6. Mobilize resources**

Mobilizing the legal, technical and financial resources needed to implement solutions is essential. Early actions should be those that can be done with existing resources, while the planning process must address resource-mobilization to deal with larger-scale problems. For development opportunities, there may be options to mobilize investment. All sectors, including the private sector, may be involved in investment and service provision.

#### **Step 7. Develop a medium-term plan**

After enough learning occurs about PRBDM among stakeholders, participants will eventually be more able to prepare a medium-to-long-term plan for between 5 and 20 years duration. This would identify, prioritize, assign responsibilities, and describe the implementation schedule and resource-mobilization strategy for a cumulative series of interventions based on IWRM principles.

***A Graph of this 7-step approach can be found on the last page of this Brief.***

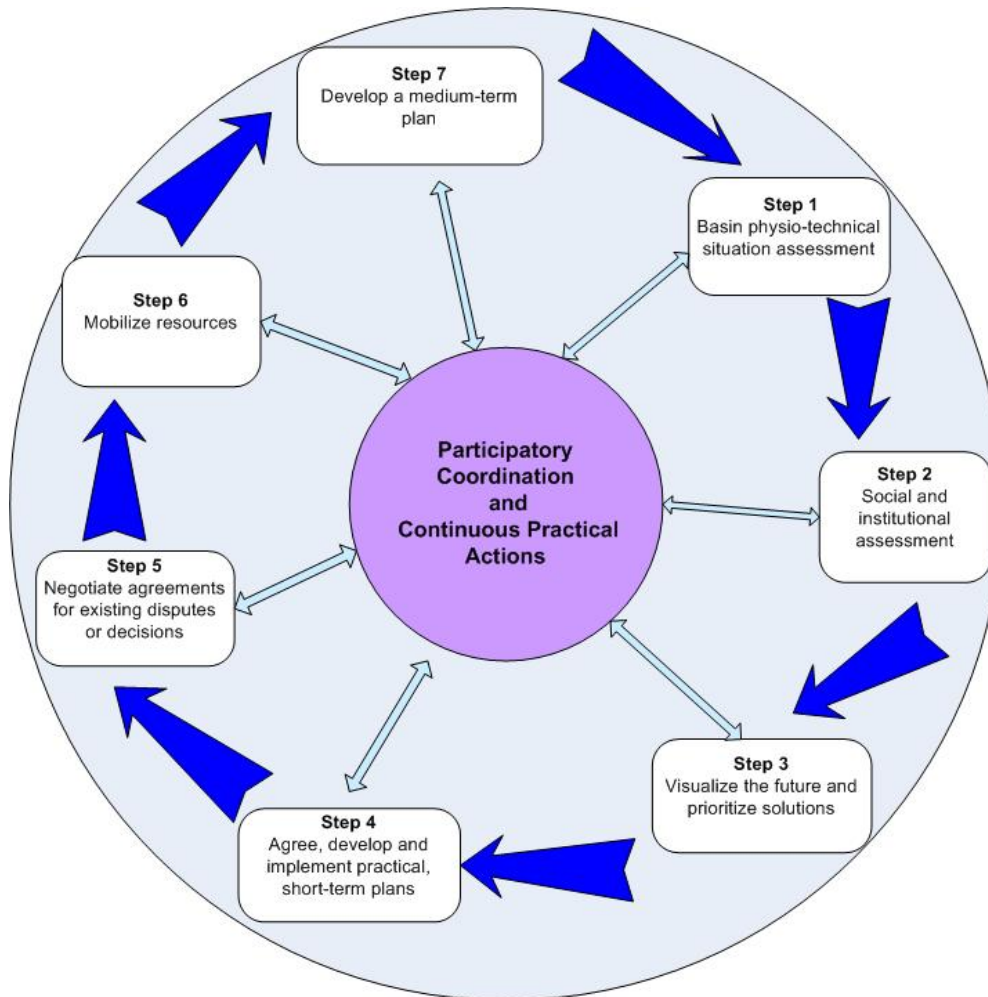
#### ***Facilitate a Practical Way Forward***

Across the world river basins are getting fully- and over-utilized. Population increases, economic diversification, urbanization and climate change all create great stress on river basins. Water is becoming scarce, flooding is increasing and pollution is spreading. Competition and conflicts over water are increasing. Often, dozens of agencies and many types of water users have a stake, though not necessarily a right, in the water. Now is the time to act, but pragmatically.

Euroconsult Mott MacDonald (EMM) is ready to work together with governments, donors, experts and stakeholder groups to help dislodge the current widespread impasse in moving toward more integrated development and management of river basins under increasing stress. Different countries will have different constraints and challenges to overcome. EMM can assist in the following ways:

- Help clients prepare assessments and plans for PRBDM;
- Assist with situational and social/institutional assessments of existing river basin problems and opportunities;

- Assist with preparation of multi-faceted scenarios of river basin conditions;
- Facilitate conduct of effective stakeholder consultations and decision making;
- Facilitate processes to establish new institutions and forums, or change existing ones;
- Help with preparation of short and medium-term plans;
- Facilitate negotiations and dispute resolution;
- Prepare proposals to mobilize funding and advise on possible sources;
- Assist with monitoring, evaluation and exchange of lessons learned.



**Pragmatic River Basin Development and Management:**

**A process of incremental assessment, negotiation, problem solving, experimentation, learning and gradual institutional development**

**You are welcome to contact us:**

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