

Briefing Note

Promoting livelihoods and influencing policies through Area Water Partnerships in South Asia

A Region of Promise

- High economic growth potential (over 5% GDP)
- Time tested democratic governments and institutions
- High human and social capital
- Strong traditions of sustainable water resources management
- Awareness of IWRM and platforms and forums in place
- Need for national policies on water management appreciated by governments.
- High levels of professional capacity and innovative thinking in water management.

The Context

South Asia is the most populous sub-region in the world, providing a home to about 23% of the global population. It is also a region with much diversity with respect to water resources, culture, religion, politics and management styles. Therefore, although the concept of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) had been widely accepted by the beginning of new millennium, a common strategy to implement the principles was difficult to formulate. Furthermore, some of the river basins in the region were so vast that bringing the stakeholders into a common platform was practically difficult. In this background, GWP South Asia pioneered Area Water Partnerships (AWPs) in 2001 as a mechanism to promote dialogue and local action among stakeholders on water resource management issues that affects their lives and livelihoods. In South Asia, AWP have been formed in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. There are 38 functioning AWP now, and it is planned to form six more in 2012. AWP in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka cover an area of approximately 200,000 sq. km. The AWP in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka (excluding India), serve a population of approximately 65 million.

An innovative approach

The AWP are innovative, local level informal institutions which view water as an 'entry point' for natural resources management as well as for improving livelihoods. In the process, they have demonstrated the ability to integrate the stakeholders and institutions both horizontally and vertically, and unlocked tremendous potential in dealing with issues of water management and poverty. Primarily, the basis for partnership is the interest in the management of water resource at whatever capacity; they are thus open and inclusive.

Benefits outweigh costs

Cost-effectiveness is one of the major advantages of AWP interventions. They operate on very small annual budgets in the range of US\$ 1000-2000, sometimes obtaining support from government and private organizations. 15 out of the 16 AWP in India are self-supported with funds and support coming from the government, stakeholders and private donors. Influenced by the AWP activities, the Madhya Pradesh State government invested in improving the storage capacity in Kshipara River by approximately 200 million m³.

In Pakistan, the Karachi Water Partnership raised US\$ 70,000 of which only 17 per cent came from institutional sources while the Nara Canal AWP activities were supported by governments of China and Pakistan. The Colombo Rotary Club supported the improvement of sanitary facilities in Maha Oya watershed in Sri Lanka. AWP members' in-kind contributions have also helped to keep the costs down.

Though the benefits of such interventions can sometimes be quantitatively measured, as shown by the examples above, the majority of interventions have qualitative impacts such as behavioural change and have reached beyond the immediate targets, by positively influencing national policies and strategies.

The approach to address water issues

The AWP have adopted different approaches to address water issues, in consideration of the local political environment and hydrological aspects. But there are some common features such as the emphasis on bottom-up approach, awareness creation and capacity building.

The activities they perform have been targeted at the major water related issues of the community. In Pakistan, some AWP have focused on agricultural productivity and groundwater management. The Karachi Water Partnership (KWP) created a Town Area Water Partnership which served as a model, reaching over one million urban people to effect water-saving, while the Bolan Area Partnership revived an ancient system of underground water channels which had run dry due to acute drought and poor management.



Activities of Kshipara AWP and Navadeep Voluntary Organization helped to increase the storage capacity in Kshipara River in India

The Vision,

Poverty in South Asia will be eradicated and living conditions of all the people will be uplifted to sustainable levels of comfort, health and wellbeing through coordinated and integrated development and management of water resources of the region.

Environmental conservation, water quality management and addressing social and technical problems arising from river sand mining have been the focus in Sri Lanka. In India, the activities were directed to improve the management of irrigation systems and water use efficiency and enhance the water storage capacity.

Depending on the focused activities, different strategies have been employed to form the AWP. Considering the geographical scale, India opted to establish Zonal Water Partnerships in addition to AWP. Sri Lanka has designed AWP at river basin or sub-basin scale, but focusing on a convenient geographical area. Creating Local Water Parliaments (LWP) was the innovative design in Nepal to mobilize communities for holistic management of water resources at micro level. The strength of the AWP has been the flexibility in their organization structure and the absence of red-tape to formulate such innovative approaches.



Naboganga Chitra AWP of Bangladesh supported its partners to create awareness in water-related health issues in Naboganga and Chitra Rivers

Positive impacts on people and environment

The AWP have been successful in engaging institutions which are not very active on the field of water management in IWRM activities. For example, Surma River AWP in Bangladesh contributed to the inclusion of IWRM in post-graduate studies of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. In Sri Lanka, Police attendance was 150% of target in all dialogues related to illegal sand mining. Kshipra AWP (KAWP) in India motivated Vikram University Ujjain to organize a workshop to highlight water management issues in Kshipra river basin, influencing the State water resources development plans subsequently. The KAWP activities received the blessings of religious leaders and encouraged the participation of a multitude of government officers, journalists and civil society organizations in the management of Kshipra River.

The AWP have been successful in bringing several disconnected parties together for a common cause, thus creating synergy, added value and exchange of competency. The link up of different stakeholders through AWP has resulted in resolution of local problems, through developing common strategies, and has empowered communities. The outcomes of increased awareness by AWP activities in Sri Lanka were the construction of latrines by the communities with external funding and industry owners treating their waste water before discharging into river.

In Nepal, multi-stakeholder discussions led to minimizing of water related disputes, and better dialogue between the community and the authorities. The Madhya Pradesh Government in India, influenced by the suggestions of KAWP, invested substantially in water storage infrastructure and in pollution control in Kshipra River.

There are noticeable impacts on livelihoods and the environment. The activities of AWP in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka have contributed to:

- Replenishment and optimum utilization of water and the rehabilitation irrigation infrastructure which helped to improve water availability and thereby have improved productivity in agriculture and aquaculture
- Pollution control in water bodies has helped in improving water quality, enabling the sustainability of water related livelihoods, availability of good quality drinking water, and reduced burden on women in hauling water
- Balanced exploitation of natural resources improved the environment and sustainability of natural resources



AWP activities in Sri Lanka helped to control environmental damage by river sand mining

The AWP activities have resulted in a bottom up approach to influence national and provincial policies, though this is yet an evolving phenomenon. Examples are found in several countries including Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. The Government of Bangladesh identified IWRM as the principal vehicle for implementation of water resources development projects in its 6th five year plan, and the AWP programmes contributed to this development. In Sri Lanka the AWP activities influenced the formulation of a national policy on sand mining, and the community was represented in the Government decision making forums. In India, KAWP's activities contributed to the "National Action Plan for Climate Change" and to the enactment of water related laws by the Madhya Pradesh State Government.

Lessons learnt and the way forward

The AWP experience shows that motivated community groups formed with a common objective can improve livelihoods and influence national policies and strategies. In this process, the AWP has narrowed the communication gap between the state officials and the community, provided a medium for constructive ideas to flow and a platform for discussions. Policy makers have to analyse conventional water management institutional structures, evaluate the costs and benefits of AWP concept, and find means to incorporate the positive features of both to improve the national institutional arrangement for water management.

Promoting Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in South Asia.

Striving for good governance, equity, access, adequacy, quality, productivity and sustainability in the water sector.

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