

Abstract

Perspectives on Governance and Institutional Arrangements for Sustainable Urban Water Management

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A proposed UN-HABITAT Urban Drainage Strategy document¹ in 2014 refers to the Urban Water Management Transitions Framework (Brown et. al. 2009)² which identifies six distinct developmental ‘states’ that cities move through toward more sustainable water management, forming a continuum that can be mapped on two dimensions, viz:

- i. socio-political drivers; and
- ii. services required as cities transition to greater sustainability.

These two dimensions have everything to do with how responsibilities for the management of urban water systems are organized. According to Brown et. al. (2009) transforming cities to more sustainable urban water cities, or to “Water Sensitive Cities”, requires a major overhaul of the hydro-social contract that underpins conventional approaches.

Systems for managing various aspects of urban water usually involve different institutions, organisations and actors. This encompasses differing roles for National and City Governments, and where formal private sector institutions have a role, it also requires institutions capable of encouraging their involvement, setting appropriate conditions and regulating their performance. However, institutional fragmentation and an inadequacy of integrated, strategic policies for the sector, are major barriers to integrated urban water policies and subsequent management of the urban water cycle in a city.

Despite some level of commitment by National governments, most have not supported the development of local government structures capable of realizing this commitment. Furthermore, managing water and other resources in an integrated and holistic manner may result in dealing with elaborate institutions which may not be easy to manage; and the interface between water and law, as well as the many complex social aspects involved in water management, may pose major governance challenges.

The paper highlights work at UN-Habitat to assess a range of existing national/city level governance and Institutional arrangements for urban water management, with a specific focus on stormwater management. It identifies the governance/institutional arrangements in place in four selected cities, and looks at arrangements that could potentially drive a process for a transition towards water sensitive cities as suggested in Brown et.al., 2009.

¹ UN Habitat (2014): UN-Habitat’s Role in Urban Drainage in the Cities of the Future: Proposed Strategy Paper

² Brown, R. R.; Keath, N.; Wong, T. H. F. (2009): Urban water management in cities: historical, current and future regimes. In *Water science and technology : a journal of the International Association on Water Pollution Research* 59 (5), pp. 847–855.