

## CONFERENCE REPORT

### **‘Comparing Water Governance in China & India: Challenges & Policy Options’, a workshop at the Institute of Water Policy, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore, 24–25 October 2014**

The purposes of organizing this research workshop on a comparative perspective of China and India were to contrast approaches and progression in water policy, to determine how each country can learn from the other’s experience, and to analyze future policy trends within Asia. China and India are large, complex entities and interesting to comprehend when studied as stand-alone entities. There is a special challenge when a comparative perspective is introduced into the equation.

In China, water is a national subject. Policies are formulated and executed by the national government. In India, water is a state subject. The central government can provide guidance, funding and broad policy frameworks, but final implementation of all water policies is under the purview of the state governments. This difference in the governance framework reflects the uneven policy environment within India, compared to the centralized policy setting in China. Other differences between the countries are reflected in the treatment of water assets. In China, all water bodies, surface as well as groundwater, are owned by the state. In India, while surface water bodies are owned by the state, land ownership determines groundwater ownership. The two countries are at different levels of economic development, which is reflected in the kind of resources the government is able to invest in water governance and infrastructure. However, the population size and rapid economic growth of both the Asian giants indicate that the countries have more in common than otherwise.

Twelve research papers were presented during the course of the workshop. In these papers, researchers charted the gradual progression of water policy tools through the years in both countries. Dr Dajun Shen and Dr V. Ratna Reddy analyzed the evolving process of water pricing reform in China and India. While China has a comprehensive pricing framework, India follows a simpler approach in setting water prices and therefore in attempting cost recovery. As budget pressures combine with increasing per capita water usage in Asia, urban water pricing and the accompanying policy goals are being rapidly recalibrated. A paper presented by Ms Veena Aggarwal, Dr Frederick Lee and Dr James Nickum investigated the status, institutions and policies of urban water pricing in China and India, with special emphasis on the capital cities of the two countries.

Dr Patricia Wouters tackled the different approaches followed by China and India in managing transboundary waters as well as how the two countries respond to changes in international water law. The different political set-ups are reflected in the different approaches of the Asian giants to water rights. A paper that compared water rights in China and India was presented by Dr Shaofeng Jia, Dr Yuanyuan Sun and Mr Jesper Svensson. Their paper illustrated the ‘tragedy of the commons’ in the use of water.

The relationship between the state and water users was analyzed in a paper presented by Dr James E Nickum and Dr Peter P Mollinga. The purpose of the paper was to explore to what extent the issues around large-scale irrigation are independent of regime characteristics. The researchers concluded that the central governments in China and India

had remarkably similar relationships with local water users. Despite the so-called decentralized approach to water policy in India, the national government exercises its influence through large irrigation projects. The results of water users' self-management and governance have been mixed in both China and India.

The implementation and policy-level comparison of incentives in using canal irrigation in the two countries was analyzed by Dr Zareena Begum and Dr Bina Gupta. The researchers used data from the Yellow River basin in China and compared it with farm survey data from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in India. The study found that although incentive mechanisms to promote water savings are effective, the positive relationship declines at later stages of reform.

Dr Oliver Hensengerth and Dr Nirmalaya Choudhury presented a draft paper discussing the regime type, civil society and governance of hydropower in India and China. A comparison of water law, policy and administration between the two countries was carried out through a perception survey by Dr Eduardo Araral and Ms Shivani Ratra. Middle and senior-level personnel in water bureaucracy, civil society, academia and the private sector were surveyed. Initial findings suggest that there is a perception that China has a more evolved water governance framework than India.

Dr Leong Ching and Maitreyee Mukherjee tackled IWRM (integrated water resources management) narratives in China's Yellow River and the Ganges in India. Using subjective perceptions of stakeholders, the researchers concluded that though formal rules and regulations have been changed to an integrated structure for water management, local, negotiated approaches continue.

Prof M. Dinesh Kumar discussed the various policy initiatives that have been taken in groundwater management in India and China. The paper delved into data on groundwater in India and concluded that the groundwater economy is controlled mainly by big farmers; that power subsidy in water-intensive areas does not reduce the monopoly power of water-sellers; and that in semi-arid regions, raising farm power tariffs would result in greater efficiency, equity and sustainability of groundwater use.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in water and sanitation in the two countries were explored in detail in a paper by professor Wu Xun, Schuyler House and Ravi Peri. China is one of the world's most active PPP markets in water. Initial comparative analysis of the PPP markets in the two countries highlighted the need for water tariff reform, strong support from the central government, and regulatory mechanisms.

Dr Cecilia Tortajada discussed the water infrastructure of China and India and explained how water infrastructure fits with the development and infrastructure goals of the two countries. The comparison between the two countries reflected the extent of the gap between them. Although China continues to have infrastructure and the resulting governance challenges, India has a far longer road to cover.

The relative gaps between China and India was the common thread in all the papers presented at the workshop. And yet, the countries seem to be at different points on the same path. It is evident that global influences, such as neoliberal thought and policy frameworks provided by multilaterals, have influenced governance throughout the developing world, including in China and India. Selected papers presented at the workshop will be published in an international peer-reviewed journal.

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