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RESOURCE

Developing a Framework for Supporting the Implementation of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) with a Decoupling Strategy

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Description / Abstract

The rise of integrated water resources management (IWRM) in the global water policy discourse marks a fundamental shift in water management from the techno-centric, top-down, supply-oriented and sectoral approach towards a holistic, participatory and demand-driven approach to sustainable water management. The IWRM concept has become dominant, permeating national, regional and international water policies, backed by heavy investments and advocacy by key global actors such as the World Bank and European Union. However, its implementation success remains unimpressive, amidst strong criticisms about its conceptual clarity. More recently, the decoupling concept spearheaded by the United Nations Environment Programme and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is gaining momentum as an alternative approach for sustainable water management. This paper reviews the two concepts both acclaimed for organizing knowledge production for sustainability. The paper examines the underlying factors that limit IWRM implementation and assesses the potentials of addressing the inadequacies of IWRM with the decoupling concept. IWRM as a process lacks a clearly defined strategy, standard measures to track the success of IWRM plans and guidance for planning and project development, while decoupling offers a viable strategy that feeds into the implementation of IWRM plan, providing strategic and operational direction towards achieving sustainability goals.

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