IWRM Action Hub

IWRM TOOL - B3
Coordination

Summary

Water resources are used by a variety of stakeholders working across different sectors and scales. This diversity of users results in divergent and sometimes conflicting perspectives. Therefore, coordination is critical for ensuring a balanced usage of water and mediating the relationship between water actors. The tools in this sub section details several platforms and bodies that enhance coordination among water-related actors, including Transboundary Organisations, National Apex Bodies, Civil Society Organisations, Basin Organisations, and Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships.

The Need for Coordination in Water Resources Management

Water management decisions are made not only by governments but also by households, farmers, businesses, and communities, who all play a role in water governance (Lieberherr and Ingold, 2019). These actors come from different sectors, need different quantities and quality of water at different times and frequencies. Coordinating these various demands is one of the most important challenges in water governance (Lieberherr and Ingold, 2019). The following are some aspects that hinder multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration in the water sector (Ayala-Orozco et al., 2018):

- **Divergent Visions and Interests**: Different interests, ideologies, and objectives across sectors and stakeholders can sometimes cause tensions.
- **Insufficient Funding and Personnel**: Inadequate funding sources and small size of facilitating team can hinder the ability to work at larger scales. Also, insufficient planning and project management can result in poor execution.

- **Lack of Communication and Information**: Deficient communication across sectors and lacking appropriate information often affects coordination.
- I**nadequate Organisation among Stakeholders**: High levels of bureaucracy and limited participation in decision-making can lead to challenges.

Roles and Functions of Coordinating Bodies

Coordination describes activities of two or more stakeholders who are focused on mobilising aid resources to harmonise policies, programmes, procedures, and practices to maximise the development of these aid resources (UN-Water, 2014). Alike water management decisions, coordination happens at several levels (i.e., international, regional, national, sub-national, and sectoral).

Overall, coordination bodies and platforms aim to overcome the "silo thinking" that is often present within the sector (Ait-Kadi, 2016). The bodies and mechanisms used for coordination must be adapted to the needs of the users and to the local context. Coordination bodies and platforms can serve different purposes under this broader objective (UN-Water, 2014):

- **Policy Development**: Collaboration with developmental partners to co-create and establish policy is often a pillar output of coordination. For example, UN-Water is a known coordinating mechanism, which coordinates the efforts of both UN entities and International Organisations working on WASH matters toward informing policy.
- **Development of Common Strategies**: Collaboration with partners to define common priorities, establish consensus, share goals and thus agree upon strategies and jointly monitor progress is another key function. Take for example the Conference of Parties (COP) mechanism which consists of representatives from member states; and it is aimed at reviewing implementation of the respective convention and collectively making decisions to further its progress.
- **Assessment of Situation and Needs**: Working with relevant partners to analyse the socio-political, technical, and economic environment, as an avenue to understand the causes, dynamics, and impact of various situations is a method that can be used in bringing coherence to a complex situation. Oftentimes an Impact Assessment Committee (Tool B1.04) can provide a mechanism for this type of assessment.
- **Dialogue and Exchange**: Meetings provide a space for evaluating present circumstances, advocacy and policy dialogue, knowledge exchange on lessons learned and it aids in building synchronized action moving forward. Additionally, one can expect to build trust, accountability, and transparency among actors present in a coordination mechanism. An example of a convening forum includes, the World Water Forum created by the World Water Council an international multistakeholder platform organisation with a mandate on mobilising action on critical water issues at all levels.

- **Resource Mobilisation**: A coordination mechanism can aid in creating a consolidated and cost-effective approach to fundraising, which can increase access to funding and efficient allocation of resources. For example, The World Bank, a global partnership advancing work on sustainable solutions and poverty reduction; and the Water Financing Partnership Facility, which mobilises additional financial and knowledge resources for implementation of the Asian Development Bank`s (ADB) water operations.
- **Addressing Common Problems**: Coordination mechanisms can be established for

the purpose of facilitating the smooth operation of projects and programmes which has two or more partners responsible for the implementation. National Apex Bodies (Tool B3.02) in this way, can often provide a forum, for different government departments and other stakeholders to work in synergy on intersectoral objectives, preventing a silo focus.

Principles and Strategies for Fostering Coordination

Some guiding principles to consider when looking at coordination can include: (i) be specific (avoid overlap and maximise synergy to ensure added value from limited resources), (ii) create a 'light' process which does not add to any existing bureaucracy, (iii) view coordination as a mutual responsibility between partners and (iv) positioning and division of labour between partners must be grounded on distinct roles originating from their respective mandate (UN-Water, 2014).

The following are some strategies that could be considered when fostering coordination among stakeholders, sectors, nations, and various NGOs, CSOs, and academic organisations relevant to the water-sector (Ayala-Orozco et al. 2018):

- **Construct a Common Vision and Identity**: It is critical to cultivate strategies which can build common objectives and foster a collective identity and common language. Making clear mutual interest towards collective action plans are important in fostering coordination. Inclusive practices are also vital as this promotes participation with minority and vulnerable groups such as women (Tools B5), children, youth (Tool C5.01), and seniors. Connect with government entities and academia towards forming trans-disciplinary working groups.
- **Capacity Building**: Create learning strategies (Tool B4.02 and Tool B4.03) which can foster learning and abilities amongst stakeholders. Mapping of stakeholders (sociogram) can allow visualisation of relationships and power balance amongst stakeholders.
- **Strengthen Communication Channels**: Build mechanisms to deepen the dialogue and information exchange across stakeholders. Promote and establish spaces for dialogue, for example, forums, fairs, and exchanges (Tool B3.05 and Tool B4.03).
- **Establish Common Values and Attitudes**: Develop interpersonal relationships which favour collaboration, interaction, and dialogue. Consider promoting awareness and respect for the decision-making processes. Also, foster equality and trust, and recognise different forms of knowledge, capacities, and ways of life amongst groups.
- **Define Functions in Community Institutions and Organisations**: Create strategies to define and establish roles for each stakeholder, functions, and mechanisms for decision making.

Sub-Section Overview

The Tools in this subsection highlight some entry points into understanding the channels and bodies that play a role in coordination within the water-sector:

- **Transboundary Organisations** (Tool B3.01): Water can be a transboundary resource and many times cross international boundaries. This reality, therefore,

increases the coordination required to successfully manage this resource. Transboundary Organisations provide a framework for coordinating and facilitating the management of water across these international boundaries where differences in political and socio-economic climates exist.

- **National Apex Bodies** (Tool B3.02): The management of water is multi-dimensional in nature, intersecting with many sectors. Hence, coordination and coherence amongst institutions which hold water-related responsibilities are critical. National Apex Bodies, in this sense provide a governmental entity which aims to provide intersectoral integrated coordination.
- **Civil Society Organisations** (Tool B3.03): Water is a broad social and economic good home to a diverse group of stakeholders. However, some stakeholders are often underrepresented. Civil Society Organisations, in this way, occupy an important space in representing the diverse interests of understated groups of the public, by being a conduit to communicate preferences to decision makers.
- **Basin Organisations** (Tool B3.04): Effective management and coordination of water often occur at the watershed level. River Basin Organisations are critical institutions which are responsible for overseeing cooperation between stakeholders, promoting economic development, environmental conservation, international trade, and regional integration.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships** (Tool B3.05): Civil Society, Private Sector, Governments, International Organisations, Media, Academia, NGOs and Research Institutes all represent stakeholders in the water sector. Having such diversity requires a coordinating entity. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships play a major convening role which allows stakeholders to share experience, information, technologies, and other resources towards solving a common problem.