Groundwater: the Political Black Box

Should we bother to open it?
We say:

‘Water is politics’

‘There is no shortage of water but there is the lack of political will to act’

‘There is no water crisis but a crisis of water governance’
The Political Black Box – paradoxes

- ‘Politics’: nobody speaks highly of it and few aspire to be part of it
- We even like to keep it out of governance
- But then we talk about ‘political will to act’
- And we only vaguely know who are the politicians
Are these the politicians?

Yemen: We are like advisors that no one listens too

Ethiopia: We only had to say yes
What we tried to do:

- Move ‘into political black box’
- Better understand role of political players and formal institutions
- Understand groundwater management is influenced by it
- Better understand what and who to target in discussion on sustainable use, management or fair access
Understanding politics in groundwater

• Understanding governance and politics of groundwater
  – How political domain is organized
  – How it interrelates with institutions
  – How it affects use, access and management

• Comparing political systems
  – Interest and positioning of different stakeholders
  – Use of different sorts of power
  – Capacity to act
  – Implications

• Final observations
Groundwater use and management

What happens on the ground:
Effective regulation of access and usage
Measures to enhance supply or influence demand

Politics

Directive control over the mechanisms of the state (budget, resource allocation, implementation)
What politicians do
Part of a larger political enterprise

Institutions

Laws, policies, government organizations, financing mechanism, stakeholder organization, ..
WHAT AREA IS COVERED BY GOVERNANCE?

Politics

Groundwater use and management

Politics

Institutions

What happens on the ground:
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Groundwater

- Invisible
- Unknown quantities
- Autonomy of the operators
- Recent use
- Anarchy
Comparing two countries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHIOPIA</th>
<th>YEMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental state</td>
<td>Oligopolist autocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leadership</td>
<td>Personalized leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early but accelerated development</td>
<td>Recognized overuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership transition</td>
<td>Arab Spring – now Ugly Playground</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Groundwater use and management
- Leadership interest
- Orientation of government support
- Stimulating gw use
- Regulating access
- Regulating use
- Stimulating recharge

Political domain:
- Ruling system
- Mechanisms of control
- Link to formal democracy
- Centre vs region

Institutional domain:
- Link to government institutions
- Link to water users
- Implementation of development
Yemen
Yemen

- Groundwater irrigation up to from 17,000 ha to 400,000 ha in 40 years
- Imbalance 7-50% for different basins
- Increasing bore failure – 40% of new drinking water system
- Abandonment of land in fragile coastal areas
- Yet no interest from political leadership
Yemen

- **Political system (up to 2011)**
  - Personalized leadership > no capacity to discuss issues
  - ‘thriving on chaos..’ – liability of instability – security as a business
  - ‘he who rides a lion…’ > diesel subsidies and massive transfers
  - Soft power > elite patronage exceeds any other spending and little trickle down (35% calorific shortage and Gini Coefficient at 0.44)
  - Development efforts: primarily externally supported
Political mechanisms and implications for groundwater

- Direct financial transfers
  - Creates new waterlords
  - Exceeds all else
  - Whatever rhetoric – funding for groundwater management miniscule

- Diesel subsidies
  - 20% of budget, one-third for agriculture – dwarfs funding for groundwater management
  - Patronage

- Jobs and ghost jobs (30-40%)
  - Yet key organizations underresourced

- Privileges in access in public funds
  - Affect priorities: smalls dams as prestige projects
Institutional domain

- Considerable but largely parallel effort to build up modern system of government – with external support
  - Enlightened laws and plans
  - Much support directed at national institutions
  - Considerable institutional fragmentation
Management on the ground

• Negligible political interest
  – More profitable pursuits (security business)
  – Different interests (case of diesel subsidies)
  – Limited span of local control/ political capacity
  – Limited attention span

• Only local management
  – Good examples
  – Areas of neglect
Groundwater in the political domain
Groundwater in the political domain

Wadi Dela
Political leadership (after 2011)

- Still evolving – pre-empts the agenda
- Survival mode: limited capacity to handle issues
- Stage managed security issues: ‘thriving on chaos part b’
- Institutions more politicized (earlier was not necessary)
- External development funding reduced > less regulation
- Downsizing largesse – reduced diesel subsidy which hurts, even destabilizer
- National dialogue game changer:
  - Towards federal and civil state
  - Dismantling bureau of tribal affairs
  - Water challenges recognized
  - Yet other transition priorities
- But now vacuum ‘sucked in itself’
Groundwater in the political domain
Arab Spring 2011: Political Crisis 2011 in Yemen and energy factor
This study aims to analyze the links and interactions between diesel subsidies, groundwater pumping and cropping pattern within political domain.

Study Objective
Groundwater in the political domain

Ethiopia
Ethiopia – its untapped potential

- Groundwater mainly for drinking water
- Very shallow groundwater (< 8 m) out of picture for long time – yet widespread unused, unknown potential
- GTP2: 2 M ha under groundwater irrigation (now 200,000 ha) – politics of high targets
- Little small holder private development
- For long time handholding mode – now new programs
- Undercapitalized rural economy and insecure or blocked access to high potential areas
Groundwater in the political domain
Ethiopia

- East Asian model: developmental state
- Dominant party democracy
  - Inner political circle
  - Develops functional alliances
  - Use of BPR and balanced score cards
  - Many individuals reluctant to join
  - Plans and visions abound – curse of high targets
- Strong presence at local level: certain type of implementation power
  - Voluntary labour; engagement in committees; local courts
  - Relations with higher-ups
  - ‘Peasant subordinization’
- Corruption is modest
Political mechanism and implications for groundwater

- Hegemonistic system – no other centre of initiative
- ‘Curse’ of high targets: too much political will leads to faulty execution
- ‘Curse’ of high targets: mechanism of control
- Uneasiness with private development
- Emerging conflicts because of increased use – management mechanism not yet articulated
Groundwater in the political domain
Raya/Kobo GW wells not operational?

Many of the drilled wells are not operational for a number of reasons:

- Purchase of pumps.
- Distribution systems.
- Power supply.
- Determination by the middle level decision makers (at that time).

Community concerns on GW irrigation in Raya-Kobo valley

- Farmers feel that with the ongoing extensive groundwater drilling, the government could give their land to private investors?
Groundwater in the political domain
Institutional domain

• No regulation yet – may/ should come
• Limited capacity – compared to targets
• Blocked access to high potential areas
Management on the ground

- Development mode – much government controlled/ facilitated
- Problems of access
  - Local land grabbing
- No regulation – but emerging conflicts
Political systems = after 2012

- Continuity
- Broad based and decentralized leadership – resilient to change
- Use of corruption card to confirm new equations
Comparison - conclusions

• Larger political system more important than water governance
• Rather than at political will look at political capacity – ability to use different types of power
  – Hard enforcement power
  – Soft negotiation power
  – Soft ideational power
• Look at what happens at local level rather than focus on central institutions
From local to global

Where do we intervene?

NWO – CoCoon Conflict and Cooperation in Natural Resources
Groundwater in the political domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political system</th>
<th>Yemen</th>
<th>Ethiopia</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political interest in water</td>
<td>Autocratic</td>
<td>Development state</td>
<td>Semi-military state</td>
<td>Contested democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Increasing water scarcity</td>
<td>New resource</td>
<td>Expansion beyond Nile</td>
<td>Mega-irrigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-issue</td>
<td>Development issue</td>
<td>Showcase</td>
<td>Politicization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Groundwater in the political domain

- Yemen
- Ethiopia
- Egypt
- Pakistan

Relations of power and influence:
- International
- National
- District
- Users
Groundwater in the political domain

Relations of power and influence:
- International
- National
- District
- Users
Yemen – different types of power

- Yemen – central leadership is weak and is in perpetual balancing act
  - No hard enforcing power
  - No soft ideational power
  - Only soft negotiation power but not much geared to groundwater management or development as such
Yemen – way forward

- Local governance – support the process and make it part of overall governance
- Find the right champions i.e. young sheikhs
Ethiopia – different types of power

- Ethiopia – party and government strongly integrated at different level
  - Hard enforcement power
  - Soft ideational ‘can do’ power
  - No soft bargaining power – creating little scope for development by private initiative (uncertainty on tenure, monopoly on rural investment, no acceptance of farmer entrepreneurs, upward accountability)
Ethiopia – way forward

• Work with national and regional government – policy and politics coincide:
  – Open up to private initiative
  – Start managing equal access and sustainable management – mechanisms are there
  – Discuss local access/ land grabbing issues
Some final remarks

- Much attention for governance but -
  - Power/ politics left out of the equation
  - Politics narrowed down to ‘political will’ – but no attention for (1) larger and obscure game of interest and (2) political capacity/leadership (we may overstate ability (3) assumes omnipotent ‘deus ex machina’ – if only there was political will – leads to disengagement
The need to ‘politicalize’ the governance debate

- Find the space
- Understand how much/little can be changed
- Politicalize the governance debate
Can we have a different type of politics

- More geared to resource management rather than ‘security’
- Is hard power better? It creates soft ideational power as well and it helps to deliver...