

Title: Introduction: 'Some for All Rather than More for Some'? Contested Pathways and Politics since the 1990 New Delhi Statement

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More details/abstract: This introduction reviews the experience of the water and sanitation sector since the 1990 New Delhi Statement – Some for All Rather than More for Some. It explores the policy pathways and contested politics that took place as a result of three key years in the early 1990s, from the issuing of the New Delhi Statement in 1990, through the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development in 1992, to the output of the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro. These key events have shaped policy and practice over a period of two decades, including generating major contestation over the idea of water as an economic good. Past lessons suggest that the wider global water and sanitation community needs to rethink approaches and emphases, shifting from targets and global pronouncement to issues concerning sustainability, global/local mismatches, contested knowledges, equity, politics and power.

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Is there ‘some for all rather than all for some’?

Perspectives and Pathways since the 1990 New Delhi Statement on Water and Sanitation

1 Introduction

Access to water and sanitation for all is central to achieving global justice for poor women and men. Yet the global aid architecture is still straining to solve what appears on the surface a simple problem: how to provide water and sanitation to the planet’s population. Despite successive global declarations and efforts, according to the latest global assessment (the UN Water Gliaas Report), in 2008 over 2.6 billion people still lived without access to improved sanitation facilities and nearly 900 million people received drinking-water from unimproved sources. At the core of this appalling situation is a global failure of collective action, despite repeated principles, declarations and meetings.

The 1977 Mar del Plata Conference was the first – and still the only – global conference on water held under United Nations auspices. The international awareness-raising which resulted, led directly to the UN ‘Water Decade’ (1981-1990) which had lofty ambitions of achieving universal coverage by 1990. At the end of the decade, the target remained far off, for a multitude of reasons, not least the huge debt crisis that had engulfed many developing countries during this period. To assess what had happened and to look at future pathways in collective action, the UN held a global consultation in New Delhi in 1990, hosted by the Indian Government. As we approach another major juncture – 2015¹ – and further global events in 2012 (the 6th World Water Forum and Rio +20) – this bulletin looks back at the legacy of New Delhi (and the Dublin Conference that followed in 1992), assesses their meaning and significance and challenges the wider global water and sanitation community to rethink approaches and emphases, shifting from targets and pronouncement to sustainability and local knowledge.

Under the slogan, ‘Some for all rather than all for some’, the New Delhi Statement was expected to set a course for the global community following the 1990s, mindful that progress had not been satisfactory during the decade and that a far larger global meeting was scheduled for 1992 – the ‘Earth Summit’ in Brazil. Few today, however, are aware of New Delhi and its statement of intent, having been eclipsed by the Dublin International Conference on Water and the Environment, held in January in 1992. Notorious for its ‘4th Principle’ (discussed below) and largely the reason for capturing global attention, Dublin has been a focus of policy differences and global fault lines ever since. Some argue that this has actually hampered global efforts at achieving the elusive goal of universal coverage, if not the less ambitious but more pragmatic ‘Some for All’ of New Delhi. Was Dublin a necessary distraction, or a form of ideational strategic sabotage?

Looking back at the intervening 21 years was the objective of Liquid Dynamics II, the second STEPS Water and Sanitation Symposium entitled ‘*Some for all? Politics and Pathways in Water and Sanitation since New Delhi 1990*’. Bringing together current

thinkers and past architects of the New Delhi Statement, as well as those deeply involved in current policy and practice, the meeting posed questions, including: Why has the nature of collective action been so convoluted in addressing what is such an easily-definable problem? Are global declarations and targets as much a part of the problem as the solution and is there a mismatch with on-the-ground realities? What can be done better next time and are there alternatives to the dominant paradigms and pathways as exemplified in ‘big pronouncements’?

The New Delhi Statement, presented as an appeal for ‘concerted action’, was adopted at the Global Consultation on Safe Water and Sanitation for the 1990s, co-sponsored by the UN Steering Committee for The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade and by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (established just prior to the meeting (see Lane, below). The statement underscored that insufficient progress had been made during the Water Decade (1981-1990), and recommended four guiding principles:

- Protection of the environment and safeguarding of health through the integrated management of water resources and liquid and solid wastes;
- Institutional reforms promoting an integrated approach and including changes in procedures, attitudes and behaviour, and the full participation of women at all levels in sector institutions;
- Community management of services, backed by measures to strengthen local institutions in implementing and sustaining water and sanitation programmes;
- Sound financial practices, achieved through better management of existing assets, and widespread use of appropriate technologies.

Each principle had an accompanying text, summarised below.

Principle No. 1: *The Environment and Health*, emphasised waste management and the need for integrated water resources management. Communities should be an ‘equal partner’ in this with government and sector agencies. Indigenous knowledge was important and lent credence and relevance to policies and programmes. This was linked to a focus on education, social mobilisation and community, and the seeking of solutions that were environmentally appropriate and affordable ‘to the communities they serve’. Integrated Water Resources Management was, it argued, also necessary to combat increasing scarcity and pollution.

Principle No. 2: *People and Institutions* focused on establishing strong institutions amidst an ‘enabling environment of appropriate policies, legislation and incentives’, and warned against targets taking precedence over capacity building. Government roles should become those of ‘promoters and facilitators’, enabling local public, private and community institutions to deliver better services. The importance of decentralisation was emphasised as well as local private enterprise to improve efficiency and expand service delivery. There was a heavy emphasis on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including extolling governments to support them in replicating approaches, and include

them as partners. The statement also made strong reference to training, education and curricula development.

Principle No. 3: Community Management emphasised empowering and equipping communities to ‘own and control their own systems’, which would help to ensure sustainability in service delivery. Communities should have ‘prominent roles in planning, resource mobilization, and all subsequent aspects of development’, including women ‘playing influential roles in both water management and hygiene education’. An emphasis was placed on linkage between national plans and community ‘needs and desires’.

Principle No. 4: Finance and Technology called for more effective financial strategies for long-term sustainability, suggesting that to fill the funding gap there should be increased efficiency in use of available funds and mobilisation of additional funds from existing and new sources, including governments, donors and consumers. Consumer choice of technology and service levels had proved to have had ‘a positive impact on cost recovery and sustainability.’ Clear sector strategies and plans would help encourage prioritisation in national planning processes and, given the debt burden of countries at the time, agencies and donors were ‘urged to look favourably on requests for grants or soft loans to support water and sanitation programmes’. The statement added that setting of user charges was a key issue in sector finance and the recovery of recurrent costs was emphasised alongside widespread promotion that ‘safe water is not a free good’.

The consultation was expected to lead to national-level action plans for water and sanitation, incorporating the above principles, and was presented by the Indian Government to the 45th Session of the UNGA in October 1990. This was part of what the organisers anticipated would be a wider influencing agenda by the global water community on the Earth Summit in Brazil. In fact, however, the New Delhi Statement became rapidly overshadowed by the ‘Dublin Statement’, the product of a meeting held in January 1992 under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization as a preparatory meeting for Rio.

Varady and Iles-Shih (2009) (and others) identify Dublin as the single most important global water initiative, whereas New Delhi merits no place within their analysis (table 1.3 in Varady and Iles-Shih, 2009). This single view reflects a far greater reality that the Dublin conference held just over a year later eclipsed New Delhi and raises important questions – some of which are touched on in this bulletin – about the way in which processes and messages in global public policy are formed and attain influence and, therefore, what their legitimacy is. A particular emphasis of Dublin was on the fourth principle, on water as an *economic good*. In full, this stated:

Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good: Within this principle, it is vital to recognize first the basic right of all human beings to have access to clean water and sanitation at an affordable price. Past failure to recognize the economic value of water has led to wasteful and environmentally damaging

uses of the resource. Managing water as an economic good is an important way of achieving efficient and equitable use, and of encouraging conservation and protection of water resources.²

Comparing the major headline statements from Delhi and Dublin reveals that although similarities existed, this fourth principle established the greatest divergence between the two meetings. Dublin made a centrepiece out of a ‘economic’ valuation of the resource, which was seized upon by powerful institutions and became part of the wider ‘Washington Consensus’, under which the state’s role shrank, and there was greater adherence to free-market capitalism and the commoditisation of resources (Finger and Allouche, 2002). Water as an ‘economic good’ sat comfortably within this new consensus.

Table 1: The Delhi and Dublin Principles

Delhi Principles	Dublin Principles
Protection of the environment and safeguarding of health through the integrated management of water resources and liquid and solid wastes	Fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource , essential to sustain life, development and the environment.
Institutional reforms promoting an integrated approach and including changes in procedures, attitudes and behaviour, and the full participation of women at all levels in sector institutions	Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach , involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels
Community management of services , backed by measures to strengthen local institutions in implementing and sustaining water and sanitation programmes	Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water
Sound financial practices , achieved through better management of existing assets, and widespread use of appropriate technologies.	Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognised as an economic good.

Source: United Nations 1990 and 1992

The strength of Dublin was not just that this principle chimed with a new development paradigm, but that it resonated with Agenda 21, Chapter 18 on Freshwater (United Nations 1992; Salman 2003, 2004), which stated that: ‘Integrated water resources management is based on the perception of water as an integral part of the ecosystem, a natural resource and a social and economic good, whose quantity and quality determines the nature of utilization’. It also stressed ‘the implementation of allocation decisions through demand management, pricing mechanisms, and regulatory measures’.³ Further discussion of this interrelationship can be found in **Cullet** in this *IDS Bulletin*.

In short, the economic valuation of the resource rapidly became a part of wider debates on natural resource scarcity and concerns over environmental resources and ‘water scarcity’ more generally in the 1990s (Mehta 2010). Winpenny (1994) argued that this new approach to valuation would increase water supply coverage and encourage private investment as ‘low prices depress the profitability of investment in the water sector’ (Winpenny 1994: 18). The enabling environment for such a policy would be a clear separation between the operator and the regulator, as well as measures that provided for real costs, water tariffs, and demand management.

Declaring water an ‘economic good’ in Dublin remains deeply controversial. Many in the water domain still feel this not only legitimises the ‘commodification’ of a life-giving resource, and continues to justify privatisation and resource capture (most recently manifested in ‘water grabs’ taking place as part of wider land grabbing). Strictly speaking, ‘economic goods’ are goods that are scarce and legitimise human action and market intervention (Mehta 2010); in so doing this privileges certain types of meaning and beliefs over others, including cultural and public good aspects. These are part of the more complex realities at a local level that simple economic valuations may overlook. But these extend beyond water as an economic good to other categories – our belief in ‘communities’ as management entities or our uncritical use of ‘coverage figures’ to assess progress.

In some ways, both New Delhi and Dublin are part of a far larger issue across the water domain of establishing and replicating simplistic visions of what exists (the reality that we address) and what should be done (the policy prescriptions that form our response). The arguments and experiences of the participants at Liquid Dynamics II reveal that a far more complex, denser reality exists which, in many cases, both policy and practice fail to grasp. This has been termed *Liquid Dynamics* – the often neglected patterns of interaction between the social, technological and ecological dimensions of water and sanitation which raise important questions about how different actors behave, the outcomes they achieve (and want to achieve) and how specific interests are served by particular actions. Key perspectives from the symposium on these and other issues are explored below.

i. Politics (not) as usual

Emerging from the discussions and papers was the strength of political activity at all levels shaping and reshaping actors, relationships and processes of policy development and implementation. A global ‘high politics’ of water has emerged during the 1990s, dissociated and increasingly lacking in legitimacy but driven forward by meetings of dubious global legitimacy (Gleick and Lane 2005). Whilst at a local level, a politics of power and control continue to shape outcomes for poor men and women.

The dominant pathway in global approaches to the water and sanitation challenge is to seek ambitious targets (but frequently fail to assess why efforts so often fall short). The call for greater ‘political will’ is often heard, but more complex and nuanced environments (and institutions) suggest that a simple ‘championing’ approach will not work. **Gouri Ghosh** underscores the important collaboration that took place between UN

agencies and governments during the 1980s UN ‘Water Decade’ but that subsequent bias by some institutions led to a focus on Dublin – and water as an economic good. This included the recasting of New Delhi’s ‘some for all’ call as a recipe for ‘free water’, which it was not, he says. The shift of emphasis to economic tools and a decade of missed opportunities resulted.

‘High water politics’ infuses **Philippe Cullet**’s piece. He sees a turning point in the way policy and law has been constructed during the 1990s. The wider institutional and political landscape shifted significantly after New Delhi leading to a ‘crisis of legitimacy’, and a blurring of the distinction between policy processes and legal processes. There has been a bypassing of democratic and public mechanisms in favour of less public and less transparent structures. The Dublin principle on water as an economic good, he argues, has been the ‘single most important’ change to water policy, leading to a focus on demand management and increases in water use efficiency. He argues, however, that these principles lacked legitimacy and had no UN General Assembly endorsement.

Anuradha Joshi and Suneetha Dassa-Packer, looking at the role and regulation of small-scale informal service providers in New Delhi highlight a key relationship between providers and consumers – a kind of ‘low water politics’. Central to this relationship is the role of political awareness and competition at a community level, enabling a break from clientilism with local elites and stronger engagement with public service providers. The importance of informality (filling a need/demand) and the relationship to local political actors is often reinforcing rather than reforming, with local leaders having vested (and hidden, perhaps) interests in continued informal provision. In some cases this has meant ‘Some for all’ becoming less and less for all. Yet these and other challenges have led to local political (re)action, with residents’ groups petitioning government on the right to water supply and the responsibility of government to provide for this, echoing a more recent shift to rights-claiming based on an emerging global consensus on the human right to access to water and sanitation.

ii. Knowledge – contested and convoluted

International events may propel forward policy ideas and global public awareness of problems, but they can also help to concretise misconceptions of progress and perceptions of what (and whose) knowledge ‘counts’ in addressing water and sanitation issues. The issue of ‘knowing’ is both central to political action and how a wider global public perceive change. A number of authors tackle these ideas.

Synne Movik challenges the dichotomisation that has emerged between ‘public and private’ and suggests that needs and models should fit circumstance. Using a South Africa example, she notes how target-driven approaches to provisioning free basic water under a ‘some, for all, for ever’ motto devolved responsibilities to municipalities, where the urge to reach universal coverage encouraged target-driven approaches based on infrastructure development and access at the expense of ‘functioning and quality of service delivery’. In the urge to reach universal coverage ‘the ability to actually meet

needs is compromised’ – a shortfall in wider understandings of social and environmental as well as technical sustainability.

Contestations along a public-private fault line are the subject of **Mohamed al-Afghani**’s paper on Indonesia, where the private sector model – and concessionary contracts – were tried during the 1990s mirroring attempts at ‘bringing the private sector in’ but led to a rash of movements aimed at preventing private sector engagement. The notorious Jakarta concession for water supply is a particularly bad example of how a lack of regulation and control affected major water supply initiatives, but he shows how other publicly-oriented approaches in Indonesia are less ambiguous on rights, roles and responsibilities, and more successful as a result.

The critical knowledge embedded locally in addressing future challenges such as climate change and impacts on water supplies is central to the analysis of Rajasthan by **Michael Mascarenhas**. He highlights the importance of local knowledge in terms of adaptation to climate uncertainty, noting the importance of local institutions in ‘nurturing practice that advances both household social reproduction and women’s status within the community’.

Gaining new knowledge is a contested and sometimes politically-driven process. The donor world has a particularly poor record of seeking out ‘new numbers’. **Katharina Welle *et al.*** examine the experience of the National WASH inventory process in Ethiopia and question the underutilisation of sector monitoring results. The authors locate this in processes of knowledge creation linked to power and political economy at a national level. This includes institutional inertia related to bundling together institutions with different mandates under ‘WASH’, and to donor push resulting in data collection as a process of ‘mass mobilisation’, rather than deeper learning and experience sharing.

Integration of different knowledge systems – the expert and lay– is the substance of a paper by **Tim Karpouzoglou and Anna Zimmer**. Examining how integration can take place of different ‘knowledges’ within policy-making on wastewater, they argue that this resonates strongly with the New Delhi Statement’s call to strengthen citizens’ participation in the implementation of water and sanitation programmes. Examining a wastewater case study from the same city, they note that engineering works become ‘markers of development’, within which the knowledge of local communities is lost. The value of citizens’ accounts, they argue, lies not only in addressing the politics of wastewater in an elaborate way, but in directing attention to complex social and environmental impacts of untreated wastewater. Concluding, the authors argue that wastewater issues often lack their own ‘policy space’. As our next finding shows, this may be changing, certainly at a global level.

iii. Sanitation – old issues, new dynamism

One of the most important shifts since New Delhi has been a far stronger growing focus on sanitation – including new solutions. A ‘policy space’ has emerged, within which there are new dynamics, but also familiar problems of global statements not followed up by action, particularly at national government level. The role of government in addressing

the sanitation gap is now more complex, but essential to address, particularly as parallel campaigns seek to underscore the right to sanitation, and, at the same time, decry past failures of government-subsidised approaches.

Looking back at the last two decades based on field knowledge and deep engagement in policy processes, **Jon Lane** emphasises that progress has been achieved and stresses the world is ‘slightly better off’ in terms of water supply. However, progress in the last 20 years has not closed the sanitation gap and the MDG on improved sanitation will be missed by about a billion people in 2015. He notes, however, that neglect of sanitation has begun to change and the huge benefits to improved sanitation are beginning to be understood, including the ‘sound financial’ practices, emphasised in New Delhi. He argues that the focus in Dublin on water as an economic good led to considerable misunderstanding and overshadowed progress made in New Delhi and highlights some of the challenges of taking a good idea and putting it into practice, noting the sector ‘enthusiasm’ for IWRM, but actual problems in operationalisation.

New Delhi’s emphasis on locally-appropriate technologies is echoed in **Duncan Mara**’s examination of technological solutions, including ‘arborloos’ for low-density rural areas and simplified sewerage for high-density urban areas. The former provides a connection between providing sanitation and deriving value as a result – as he puts it ‘excreta in, money out’. But, he argues, in spite of affordable options, there is a real problem of lack of commitment in practice by developing country governments. Although some have led to great improvements – Malaysia and Thailand are cited – he believes that three key hindrances remain: a lack of ‘thinking clean’ among senior politicians; technical ignorance among local engineers; and excessive corruption. Development aid has also been to blame, and should focus on technical training and knowledge dissemination.

Kamal Kar argues for collective behaviour change on a grand scale using CLTS, an ‘innovative approach for empowering communities to completely eliminate open defecation’. This is achieved through a process of collective local action with no individual hardware subsidy and no prescribed models. He states that some 50 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have now adopted the approach. The global achievements of this approach are echoed in a number of the papers.

iv. The community as entry point – and myth

Embedded in the notion of community is a preconception about communities being able and willing to exercise management functions. This is challenged at many levels by Bulletin authors. There are concerns that the often fragmented and politicised nature of communities belies a capacity to ‘choose technologies’, and that issues of equality and marginalisation are often overlooked. There is also a sense in some places that communities are constructed as failures, with resettlement and planning leading to new forms of urban space where access to water and sanitation may actually deteriorate.

The Swajaldhara programme in India was a flagship water and sanitation programme built during the 1990s on principles of cost recovery and ‘demand-responsiveness’.

Shilpi Srivastava examines this programme and shows how global policy ideas and prescriptions can frequently be undermined locally, ‘A basic underlying assumption of the scheme was that cost sharing would enable participation and implementation of ownership of water assets.’ But this was based on the idea of a homogenous community which was more fiction than reality and, in spite of a demand-led approach, government was often still regarded as the provider and responsible for any mismanagement. Though designed to be bottom-up, Swajaldhara got embedded in a top-down model of service delivery.

Delhi’s fractured state manages to produce planned slums, ‘where the state exists through its absence, and residents exist in an ahistorical space’, argues **Nishta Mehta**. In these spaces of neglect and absence, NGOs emerge as effective intermediaries between residents and public agencies, she says, reflecting by default (and not design perhaps) another key focus of the New Delhi Statement on the role of NGOs in development planning and implementation. However, Mehta argues that fragmentation of the state in Delhi is evident in planned peripheral developments that lack basic amenities, and provides NGOs with a point of entry. But NGOs, rather than fill a void left by government inaction in these new communities, should challenge current political structures by increasing the autonomy of community residents.

The lack of community homogeneity is unpacked by **Ravi Narayanan *et al.*** Exclusion is a major problem, and those who are ‘shut out’ need urgent attention. A conscious focus on equity and ensuring that accessible and affordable services are available to all is critical, and must include addressing attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers, including poor accountability mechanisms. Presenting a number of examples in South Asia the authors show how equity and inclusion can be mainstreamed, but needs to include better indicators for those who are most difficult to reach. The authors propose the application of an equity and inclusion lens to existing monitoring frameworks covering the range of stakeholder, policy and practice dimensions

Where to next?

These issues are at the heart of the work of the STEPS Centre.⁴ The water and sanitation domain of the STEPS Centre since 2007 has developed the notion of ‘liquid dynamics’ in order to advance interdisciplinary perspectives and practical action that will help address issues of sustainability and social justice in water and sanitation. Liquid Dynamics refers to the often neglected patterns of interaction between the social, technological and ecological dimensions of water and sanitation, raising questions about uncertainty, risk, politics and power.

These dynamics have often been ignored in conventional policy approaches. Instead, water and sanitation debates continue to be framed in technocratic terms, disconnected from the everyday needs of poor and marginalised women and men. Discussions since the 1990s have remained polarised and charged, and oversimplified. Liquid Dynamics I held in 2009 provided an opportunity to bring together people with different perspectives to bridge the divides evident in global policy meetings. Much of the focus was on the

interdisciplinary and political challenges and a process of addressing how alternative pathways can be found that meet the needs of the marginalised in a sustainable and just way.

The STEPS pathways approach recognises the complexity and dynamism of interlinked social, ecological and technological systems and the fact that the search for big, technical-managerial solutions that still dominates development approaches is premised on a more static, singular view of the world, a fundamental mismatch that leads to cycles of failure emerging as backlashes from nature, politics and mires of disagreement. There is a need to recognise the dynamics and interconnectedness of social, ecological and technological systems, as systems and their dynamics are always open to multiple narratives produced by people and institutions.

In 2015 the UN Freshwater Decade will have ended and the MDG targets will come under a critical spotlight. This will be another ‘global policy juncture’. We hope that the message of this Bulletin – that it is vital not to forget the past and to rush to new ‘futures’ of targets and crisis narratives – will become a part of the global public discourse in the coming years. The post-MDG world is likely to be a complex of development pathways with new narratives emerging including a focus on the human right to water and sanitation on the one hand, and links to economic growth and poverty reduction on the other. Further challenges and fault lines are to be expected.

In another 21 years the world will be fast approaching a ‘peak population’ of 9 billion people. If the problems of access to water and sanitation persist, the global collective failure will be one of epic proportions and ‘some for all’ will remain an even more distant goal.

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¹This is both the end of the UN 'Water for Life' Decade 2005-2015 see www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/ and the 'due date' for the Millennium Development Goals. **LINK DOESN'T WORK**

² www.wmo.int/pages/prog/hwrp/documents/english/icwedece.html (accessed 21 December 2011)

³ From Agenda 21, chapter 18, paragraphs 18.6 and 18.8, as adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992, www.unep.org/Documents/ (accessed 21 December 2011)

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