

Roundtable discussion on Ensuring Water Sustainability: Policies and Governance (April 1st, 2022)



Introduction

The School of Governance and Society, UMT organized a roundtable discussion on "*Ensuring Water Sustainability: Policies and Governance*", on 1st April 2022. The valuable discussion was joined by the faculty from School of Governance and Society and practitioners. The renowned experts who participated in the roundtable discussion were Dr. M. Nadeem, PhD Hydraulics and expert in water resources, Dr. Abid Bodla, Member Environment and Climate Change, Mr. Nasim Sadiq, former Secretary Housing Urban Planning & Public Health Department, Punjab Government, Tariq Altaf, Expert Hydraulics and Dams, Dr. Seemi Waheed, Professor of Public Policy (Water Policy), Dr. Aisha Azhar, Director SGS, Dr. Ahmad Ali Gul, Director Center of Disaster Management, SGS, Prof. Naveed Elahi, Professor of Practice, SGS and Dr. Hafiz Syed Mohsin Abbas, Assistant Professor, SGS.

Discussion

In her opening remarks, Prof. Seemi Waheed highlighted the critical role that water played in all aspects of life, and the importance of managing it as a common pool resource, is ownerless but is used by all. She also provided a historical context of the policies and legislation related to water resource management in Pakistan from the Easements Act 1882, to the Punjab Water Act 2019. Lastly, she outlined the practical challenges faced in the implementation of policies and opened the floor for discussions on the topic.



Dr Nadeem, expert in water resources highlighted and shared his experience in working on the Ground Water Regulatory Framework (1998-2002) and the journey of water management and governance in Pakistan. He suggested for better harnessing the water resource, a more integrated water resource management (IWRM) approach is required. He was of the view that this would pave the path towards inclusion of groundwater and surface water in water governance and the institutional transformation of the Punjab Irrigation Department into a water resource management department.

However, Mr. Sadiq expounded the challenges of water governance in Pakistan, and said that there was a need to build local models and local solutions to address local challenges. He stressed as to harvest local knowledge and wisdom, instead of requiring foreign consultants to try and ‘reinvent the wheel’. He shared his experience of working as Secretary Public Health Engineering Department, Government of Punjab, for a short stint though, but bringing some major transformation in community-managed rural water supply system. He maintained that it is important to have better decision making and we need to resolve the problems arising from favoring foreign/donor agency agenda over home-spun agenda. The discussion ended on different aspects of water resource usage and suggested the users to diversify and explore methods for water conservation, sustainability and governance.



Dr. Abid Bodla emphasized on numerous issues stemming from poor water management practices in Pakistan including 1) water logging and salinity, 2) groundwater contamination and depletion, and 3) food security. He outlined the heterogeneity in Pakistan’s water



management across agro-ecological zones. He also apprised the panel of various interventions undertaken by his department to modernize the water management infrastructure in Punjab. He highlighted the need to reduce trust deficit among riparian states, and suggested to bridge the trust among provinces on this crucial matter. Such issues are expected to worsen under ongoing and projected climate change where 20% higher flows from glacial melt, and a drying period are expected in the following 40–45-year period.

The discussion concluded with summing up the main points and thanking the honorable discussants for sharing valuable experience. The SGS plans to have more of roundtables on water resource sustainability in future.

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