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The Effectiveness of Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues on Water: Reflections on Experiences in the Rhine, Mekong, and Ganga-Brahmaputhra-Meghna River Basins

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Description / Abstract

Multi-stakeholder dialogues aim to create and support spaces, in which, meaningful conversations can take place among diverse stakeholder groups. A key notion is that dialogues can inform, and help shape, more formal negotiation and decision-making processes; by bringing in a wider range of perspectives on needs, impacts and options, and having them deliberated openly. We studied three different dialogues about water resources management and development issues, in three parts of the world: The Rhine, Mekong, and Ganga-Brahmaputhra-Meghna river basins. In each case, the primary unit of analysis was a particular dialogue or cluster of closely related dialogues, while recognizing that these were triggered by different factors (context related), and usually part of a larger process. A set of shared questions were used to guide the analysis of each case, covering initiation, format, content, and outcomes. Effectiveness was evaluated in terms of evidence of meaningful conversations, shared understanding, and influence on negotiations or decisions. Effectiveness of dialogues is clearly dependent upon not just the quality of participation and facilitation, as is widely recognized, but also on the preparation and follow-up actions by conveners and participants around main events. It also appears that, contextual factors may modify substantially the forms and effectiveness of common dialogue strategies, which deserves further systematic exploration. This study shows it is possible to draw comparative insights about the dialogues, by using relatively simple questions about principle events.

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