# Moving Towards the Local: Barriers to Participation in Water Resources Management in Kyrgyzstan

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**Abstract:**

Water has always been a security concern for Kyrgyzstan, and it is likely to become even more so in the future. It is a matter of international security because of the transboundary nature of Kyrgyz waters when reaching neighboring Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China; but it is also a matter of national security as the Kyrgyz population, as well as the country's economy and culture, fundamentally rely on this resource for survival. The discourse on water governance at the international level has repeatedly pointed at decentralization and integrated management as potential solutions towards the effective and sustainable use of water resources. In Kyrgyzstan, water sector reform has followed this pattern, but has somehow failed to achieve the expected results. This paper will try to understand why this is the case on the basis of a number of expert interviews that have been conducted in the country between September and November 2011, coupled with an assessment of the existing policy and legal frameworks that govern the current water system. In other words, this work aims at identifying identify the main barriers to successful water governance in Kyrgyzstan, and hence the challenges that it will increasingly have face in the years to come.

## 1. Introduction: water, the Kyrgyz "blue gold"

Water takes on special importance in Kyrgyzstan. Also known as "the Switzerland of Central Asia", this mountainous country at the very heart of Asia is home to a complex system of rivers, lakes and glaciers, and produces an average volume of water of 2,458 $km^3$, or the 30% of the total water resources of the region (Mamatkanov et al. 2006). Water is a constitutive part of Kyrgyz history and traditions. Indeed, Kyrgyz people have based their livelihoods on this vital resource for centuries, learning how to master it in perfect unity with the natural system they are part of, and belong to.

The Soviet era, however, fundamentally modified this relationship between humans and nature, introducing the view that water was something to be marshaled and directed by elaborate engineering to infinitely serve the economic needs of the regime. The demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought even more dramatic changes to the management of water in the Central Asian region, and in Kyrgyzstan in particular. What previously were just inter-linkages between parts of the same centrally monitored and organized system, suddenly became relations between independent states, where national interests and economic priorities prevailed over concerns for the regional wealth. The Central Asian newly independent republics were hence left with the necessity to learn how to allocate their abundant water resources to feed agricultural production, generate electricity, and quench their people's thirst. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, moreover, these requirements had to be coupled with the pressing demands for water coming from downstream neighbors. Quite obviously, water rapidly became a security issue.

In recent years, the discourse on water scarcity has come to dominate the international development agenda, on the basis of the argument that in a world that is increasingly more populated and haunted by climatic changes, water will soon be insufficient for a large share of Planet Earth. In reality, much of what passes for scarcity is a policy-induced consequence of the past (and present) mismanagement of water resources. And Kyrgyzstan is a clear example in this sense. While its astonishing wealth in terms of "blue gold" would in principle make any mention to 'droughts' ridiculous to hydrologists and people with general common sense, it is a matter of evidence that some parts of the country, especially in the South, are increasingly suffering from water scarcity. In general, out of the 46.5 $km^3$/year of total renewable water resources that flow throughout its territory, Kyrgyzstan only

uses the 24%, while the rest goes to neighboring countries. Of this share, the consumption of water for agricultural irrigation represents the 94%, while the remaining 6% is shared between households and industries (Kyrgyz Government 2009).

The Kyrgyz Government has been aware of the strategic issues connected to water resources for a long time, which is why, after independence, together with land privatization, a substantial reform of the water sector has been initiated. This culminated with the introduction of a very progressive Water Code in 2005 (Kyrgyz Government 2005), which, mirroring the international debate on water governance that has been carried out since the 2000s, fundamentally led to the introduction of the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) paradigm.[1] Amongst its general principles, IWRM foresees the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process related to water resources management, in order to ensure greater acceptance and legitimacy (GWP 2000). In addition, the IWRM approach encourages the introduction of reforms aiming at the decentralization of water management to the "lowest appropriate level", meaning that authority and accountability should be devolved from central to lower levels of government for the purpose of increasing transparency and stakeholder participation in decision-making (World Bank 1993, 8). The crucial assumption that is here made is that decentralization will enhance the participation of stakeholders in water governance processes, the sharing of relevant data and information, and the availability and access to resources dedicated to water resources management.

As nice as this may sound in theory, international guidelines and documents have, so far, failed to specify in practice how the various aspects of governance should be best arranged in order to meet the complex series of demands arising from different stakeholders. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, this has led to a fundamental

[1] The need for a new water management paradigm based on a basin approach was already recognized in the first global water conference in Mar del Plata in 1977. However, it was only after the 1992 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Rio de Janeiro, and the resulting Agenda 21 that extensive discussions started to be conducted on this issue. At the same time, at the International Conference on Water and the Environment, which was held in Dublin in 1992 in preparation for the Rio Summit, the water community noted the links that were essential for a more efficient and sustainable water resources management. This led to the formulation of the concept of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), which is described as "a process promoting the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems." See: Global Water Partnership's web-site at http://www.gwptoolbox.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=3 [last accessed: November 7, 2011].

confusion in the water sector. On one side, the new legislation has introduced a substantial decentralization of the system, which has assigned decision-making responsibilities to a broad range of authorities at different territorial levels, thereby increasing the participation of stakeholders into water management. On the other side, however, no central system for monitoring and controlling has been put in place to organize and coordinate their various. Overall, this fragmented system has impeded the sustainable and effective management of water resources both within the country and in its relations with neighboring states.

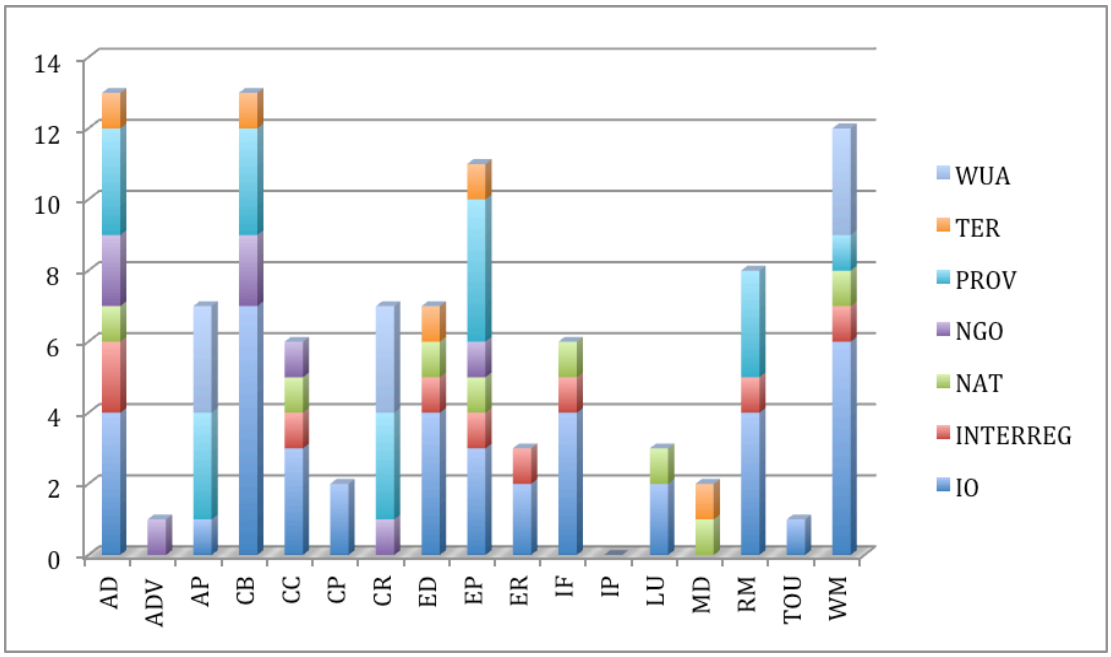
The question that one would spontaneously ask is *why*: why this very nicely designed and perfectly logic process of decentralization has failed in the case of Kyrgyzstan? What has gone wrong? The hypothesis that is presented in this work is that a number of factors such as financial constraints, political volatility, corruption and the excessive presence of external donors have led to a permanent condition of horizontal fragmentation in the water governance system in Kyrgyzstan, which, in turn, has hampered the effective participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process. Without this fundamental prerequisite, no arrangement for water resources management can be deemed efficient and/or sustainable. If the actors that are primarily concerned by water resources management do not actively participate in the related decision-making process, outcomes (e.g. policies, legislation, and projects) will not be perceived as legitimate and hence fully implemented.

## 2. Methodology

In order to investigate the causes that led to the fundamental horizontal fragmentation of the Kyrgyz water governance system, a number of interviews have been conducted with professionals and decision-makers in the water sector at different territorial levels. Systematizing interviews were used in order to retrieve information for reconstructing the actors' objective special knowledge of the water governance system they are part of. The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow for flexibility while maintaining a general configuration that guided the discussion. Qualitative data were then transcribed, coded and analyzed using the NVivo9 software.[2]

[2] For the purposes of this research, qualitative coding is understood according to the definition and methodology that is proposed by: Richards (2005).

In total, 27 interviews were conducted covering 10 international organizations (IOs), including donors and NGOs, 2 regional organizations (mostly NGOs working on Central Asia), 4 state bodies (Ministries, Committees and Agencies), 4 local authorities, and 1 local NGO. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with farmers in the Water Users Associations (WUAs) of Jalal Abad and Nookat. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the areas of competence and functions between the different categories of actors.[3]




| LEGEND | |
|---|---|
| **Type of actor (described according to its territorial scope of action)** | |
| International Organizations (including NGOs, multilateral/bilateral donors, UN agencies, regional organizations, e.g. UE, IFIs) | IO |
| Regional Organizations (e.g. IFAS) | REG |
| Local NGOs | NGO |
| National State bodies (Ministries, Committees, Agencies having a national scope of action) | NAT |
| Regional/Provincial authorities (Municipal/Oblast/Rayon administrations) | PROV |
| Water users (e.g. farmers) | WU |
| Self-governance bodies having a territorial/village scope of action (e.g. WUAs, ayil ökmötü) | LOC |
| Research Institutions, Universities | RES |
| **Activities** | |
| Adaptation | AD |
| Agriculture (including livestock) | AG |
| Climate change | CC |
| Economic development | ED |
| Environmental protection | EP |
| Education & Research | ER |
| Financial support | FIS |

[3] A list of the organizations that have been contacted for the purposes of this work is presented in Annex 1. Note that, in order to respect the privacy requirements of some of the interviewees, the list only indicates the name of the organization and not that of the person that has answered the questions.

| | |
|---|---|
| Hydropower (production) | HP |
| Humanitarian | HUM |
| Information (production of data, including weather forecasts, hydro-met services) | INF |
| Land management | LM |
| Advocacy, lobbying, information | LOB |
| Infrastructure operation and maintenance (including irrigation) | OM |
| Risk management (general) | RM |
| Tourism | TOU |
| Training (expertise, technology) | TRA |
| Water management (general) | WM |

**Figure 1: Distribution of tasks and activities per type of interviewed organization/stakeholder.**

The interviews were articulated around the following dimensions: a) the general activities in terms of water resources management of the organization represented; b) the effective level of participation, information and data-sharing, and technical, financial and human resources that characterizes the organization represented; c) the perceived challenges of the system in terms of its effective capacity to manage water resources management with respect to all possible water uses (e.g. irrigation for agriculture, hydro-power generation, tourism, etc.); and d) the way eventual conflicts are dealt with. Mirroring what emerges from the literature on water governance[4], interviews have particularly focused on highlighting the performance of the five indicators of active participation, information-sharing, financial resources, human capital, and technical resources (infrastructure and technology).

## 3. Results from the interviews: barriers to effective water resources management in Kyrgyzstan

The interviews fundamentally pointed to four factors that would seem to lead to a permanent condition of horizontal fragmentation in the Kyrgyz water governance system. This, in turn, means that the assignment of mandates and activities to competent authorities at different levels has not followed a regular and coordinated pattern, resulting in the duplication of functions and in a generally unclear definition of who is in charge of what. Horizontal fragmentation, therefore, hampers the effective participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process by limiting the fluidity of the mechanism according to which their inputs are aggregated to produce coherent and significant policies, strategies and actions. In addition, fragmentation risks enhancing the chance of an asymmetric distribution of resources endowment (e.g. financial and political) between stakeholders, reducing their incentives for

[4] See, for example: Rogers and Hall (2003); and Turton et al. (2007).

cooperative action. More in detail, this work identifies four factors that increase horizontal fragmentation, and namely: financial constraints, political volatility, corruption, and the excessive presence of external donors.

### *3.1 Financial constraints*

Most of the financial resources of the Kyrgyz government, already strained after the country has reached independence from the USSR, are currently directed towards supporting economic development, especially by attracting investments from international donors, and developing programs to improve socio-economic conditions.[5] The most important national guidelines for economic growth are contained in the Country Development Strategy 2007-2010 (CDS) (Kyrgyz Republic 2007), which outlines the mid-term vision of the Kyrgyz Republic in socio-economic terms, and is part of the process of implementation of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) for 2003-2005 (Tashbolotov 2008, 56).[6]

According to the CDS, priority is given to the implementation of several economic reforms aiming at ensuring macroeconomic stability and average annual economic growth, as well as the increase of real income and improvement of health and education services to reduce poverty rates (Kyrgyz Republic 2007). Despite "environmental sustainability" being one of the issue areas indicated by the CDS, a reorganization and rationalization of the system for water resources management has not been announced yet. This clearly indicates the scarce attention that the issue receives at the national level, especially if compared to other priority areas. More generally, it could be argued that state authorities have stopped at, and have somehow also 'profited' from, the decentralization process that has taken place in the water sector. In fact, the latter has allowed them to feel somehow legitimated to delegate tasks and responsibilities, including financial ones, to local entities.[7] These, however, do not have the adequate budget to face the burdensome requirements of the operation and maintenance of irrigation infrastructure, for example, or the delivery of drinking water and sanitation services.[8] Oftentimes, the only source of income for local authorities is the irrigation fee that is paid by farmers, which needs anyway to cover

[5] Author interviews with international organizations and local NGO, Bishkek, October 2011.
[6] The latest available NPRS refers to the period 2003-2005. Unofficial sources report that the new NPRS is currently under preparation.
[7] Author interview with representatives of a number of IOs and local self-governments, Bishkek, October-November, 2011.
[8] Author interview with representatives of the Osh BDWI, Osh, October 17th, 2011.

their administrative costs, in addition to all the other expenses linked to distributing water to users.[9] Needless to say, the financial limitations suffered by the water system as a whole hamper its effective and smooth functioning.[10]

Local governments face serious budget constraints that limit not only their activities and performance, but also the possibility to hire new and professional staff, not to mention paying current employees.[11] Low salaries are a dramatic plague of the country's water system. On one side, they implicitly encourage governmental staff to accept bribery as a way to increase their revenues, thus fostering the already high rate of corruption. On the other side, young people are not given the appropriate incentives to enter the sector, as public officials generally earn less than taxi drivers or sellers at the *bazaar*.[12] Almost all interviewees pointed to the seriousness of this issue: since the expertise that is presently available in the water management system dates back to the Soviet period, meaning that employees are now gradually becoming older and retiring, the lack of young people taking their place causes serious concerns.[13]

Therefore, financial constraints limit the effectiveness of the water governance system by making it impossible for its actors to effectively perform all the tasks they are mandated with. Furthermore, budget limitations increase the horizontal fragmentation of the system by adding elements of uncertainty to the already complex framework that is in place for water management purposes. In fact, if local and/or authorities cannot perform some of their function because of insufficient funding, they will tend to delegate them to other actors, eventually international or regional organizations, which are perceived as having more resources. While this could be in principle a smart strategy to overcome budget limitations, in the long-term it risks augmenting the number and variety of actors managing water resources in the country, and hence the confusion that reigns in the system and its inefficiency, especially if adequate mechanisms for coordination and control are not in place.

### *3.2 Political volatility*

Another important factor that hinders the capacity of the Kyrgyz water governance system to elaborate a coherent, long-term and multi-scale strategy for water resources

[9] Focus groups with local farmers, WUA Jalal Abad and WUA Abshyr Tany, October 18th-19th, 2011.
[10] Focus group with local farmers, WUA Abshyr Tany, October 19th, 2011.
[11] Author interview with representatives of local self-governments, Osh and Jalalabad, October 2011.
[12] Almost all interviewees made this observation.
[13] Author interview with representatives of local self-governments, WUAs and international donors.

management is the volatility of the country's political situation.[14] This factor has emerged particularly from the interviews that have been conducted with international actors and local NGOs –they all perceive the continuous changes in the structure of the government in general, and of the water sector in particular, as an important impediment to the effective and rational management of water resources. This fundamental problem is rooted in the very process of democratization of Kyrgyzstan, which, being based on the models of statehood and societal framework that were typical of the Soviet Union, has certainly not followed an easy path. The critical situation in which Kyrgyzstan finds itself today can be said to result from "the continual destruction of the infrastructural agreements laid down by the Soviet Union in the administrative, industrial, energy, financial and social sectors" (Schulte 2008, 6). Indeed, since independence, no effective attempts have been made towards rebuilding the managerial framework of the state, which has determined its constant failure to fulfill administrative reforms in accordance with modern standards of good governance.

In addition, Kyrgyzstan is said to present the characteristics of a neo-patrimonial state, thereby meaning that it persistently shows features of "systematic clientelism" (Gawrich et al. 2010). Accordingly, political power is concentrated in the hands of one person or group, and relies on granting personal favors to the lower levels, especially in terms of distributing public positions, commissioning to firms, and so on. This was the case in both the Akajev and Bakiyev eras; and even after the first open parliamentary elections in 2010, the different ministries have continued to being controlled by different political parties, clans and power bases. Loyalty remains fundamentally based on traditional family or ethnic ties, old Soviet party ties, and, more recently, on new allegiances like business circles (Franke et al. 2009). On this line, a number of authors has attributed the Tulip Revolution of 2005 to the strong clientelism characterizing the ruling of President Akajev, who was able to build a country-wide network of "presidential supervisors" playing as local agents of presidential rule (Huskey 2002). The successive regime was not very different, as President Bakiyev pursued the well-known pattern of distributing state positions and public offices to members of his family, so that, fundamentally, the change from

[14] Author interviews with IOs and local NGOs, Bishkek, October 2011.

Akajev to Bakiyev only consisted in a change of power from one area clan to another.[15]

In terms of water resources management, this status of things fundamentally means that: a) political and managerial positions in relevant Ministries are not assigned according to the criteria of expertise and knowledge of the personnel, thus thwarting the system;[16] and b) employees are continuously shifted from one position to the other, which means that policies, projects and activities are most of the times largely unsustainable.[17] Needless to say, this practice critically undermines the capacity of governmental and state bodies to perform their functions in the environmental sector.

### *3.3 Corruption*

From the preliminary assessment and interviews that have been conducted in the country, corruption results being another factor that puts a substantial strain on investments and financial resources effectively being directed towards water resources management, as well as environmental protection more in general. The Kyrgyz state has been defined as "neo-patrimonial", meaning that its seemingly democratic institutions are dominated by bribery, corruption, nepotism and exchange of favors among people of the same clan (Sehring 2009, 45). Indeed, the country shows some of the worst corruption rates in the world according to the transparency index.[18] Because of the Soviet political choice of mixing people with different languages and religions in the same territory, the problem of clan and familiar patronage in Kyrgyzstan is further combined with other fracture lines based on the presence of different ethnic groups, consequently multiplying the informal networks upon which corruption can be based.

In general, corruption is a complicated and complex social phenomenon, mostly resulting in profit-oriented actions that involve crime, bribes and abuse of authority,

[15] This would also be the main reason lying behind the Second Tulip Revolution of April 2010, when a popular revolt made the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Kurmanbek Saliyevich Bakiyev, leave the country and resign. Following his depart, people belonging to its clan in the South of the country started using violence too as a sign of protest which transformed in an ethnic unrest between against the Uzbek minority in the country. See: BBC News, Q&A: Kyrgyz Unrest, April 21, 2010. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8608870.stm [last accessed: November 2, 2011].
[16] Author interviews with several IOs, especially international donors, Bishkek, October 2011.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Source: Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International, Online at: http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results [last accessed: November 2, 2011].

and that damage the correct functioning of the society and the state in general.[19] In Kyrgyzstan, the magnitude of corruption varies depending on the specific economic sector under analysis. For example, it has been reported as being particularly high in the energy sector, which is characterized by elitist decision-making practices where a small and powerful group of politicians seeks to secure its private immediate benefits rather than the development of long-term and sustainable strategies (Marat 2008). The exclusive structure of water and hydro-energy management thus excludes the Parliament and other pertinent government structures from the decision-making process, which is also highly inaccessible to the public.

The main danger of corruption is that it risks destroying economic security, and renders international donors skeptical about lending to a specific project/activity without insurances in terms of how money will be effectively spent. In addition, the low salaries that are paid to state officials encourage bribe-taking, as well as the multiplicity and duplication of functions of governmental bodies. This type of system can result, for example, in inflated costs of services, goods and materials provided to the government, or in the allocation of budget resources to non-target issues, or again in the participation of "friendly-companies-only" in tenders.[20] The environmental sector suffers particularly from corruption, which makes its funding, already quite limited, shrinking even more dramatically because diverted towards other "priority" area.[21] Certainly, corruption, and the different behaviors it implies, cannot be said to encourage the water governance system to evolve in a sustainable and efficient sense to respond to the many challenges that it currently faces. The corruption factor, in fact, impedes the development of a sound and coherent long-term strategy for water resources and disaster risk management, as it subtracts investments from it, and increases the fragmentation of the governance system by encouraging personal gains and interests rather than collective ones.[22]

[19] See: Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On combating corruption", Ref. No. 51, as of March 6, 2003
[20] Author interviews (interviewees asked to remain anonymous), Bishkek, October 2011.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Note that the lack of numerous references to interviews in this section is due to the specific request of most of the interviewees mentioning corruption in their answers to remain anonymous. Notwithstanding the impossibility to explicitly reference the statements on corruption, the author deemed important to anyway report on this critical situation, as it actually is a real barrier to effective water management. Already, it could be said that the very requests to remain anonymous add an interesting layer of information to the results that are presented here, pointing to the secrecy that still surrounds this topic in Kyrgyzstan.

### *3.4 The excessive presence of external donors*

All since independence, Kyrgyzstan has tended to attract the attention of numerous international donors as it was considered the most democratic country in the region, having already put in place significant neo-liberal economic reforms. As for water resources management, external support has initially adopted an infrastructure-driven approach, working on "fixating pipes and the institutions that fix the pipes" (Sehring 2009, 18). When questions related to population growth, economic development and climate change arose at the international level, however, more attention started being paid to the necessity to move to a new, less wasteful, and more planned approach to water resources management (Conca 2006). Today, therefore, water-related assistance is characterized by the coexistence of engineering and institutional approaches, coupled with activities aiming at providing support for climate change adaptation.

Currently, donor support in Kyrgyzstan is regulated on the basis of the Country Development Strategy for 2007-2010 (Kyrgyz Government 2007), which stipulates that international actors should work in close collaboration with governmental agencies (at both state and *oblast* levels) and local NGOs and communities. However, it is international organizations and donors that still maintain the primary initiative and control over projects. While this could be considered as a laudable first step to provide national and local actors with the required expertise and knowledge to handle relatively new issues such as climate change, in the long-term it risks hampering the capacity of the same actors to devise their own strategies and action plans. To put it in other words, international actors are currently playing the role of "baby-sitters" in the water sector, especially in terms of taking action towards a more rational and sustainable utilization and allocation of the water resource. The problem is that it is not clear under what conditions and for how long this should last. [23]

Another concern with the role of international actors in Kyrgyzstan, and especially when looking at issues of water management and environmental protection, is the coordination between the different activities they are supporting and/or implementing.[24] Indeed, until very recently, efforts aimed at developing cooperation between sectors and specific institutions were substantially lacking, so that interventions proliferated without being backed by a comprehensive and coherent

[23] Author interviews with a number of local and international NGOs and international organizations, especially UN agencies, Bishkek and Osh, October 2011.
[24] Author interview with UN agency, Bishkek, October 2011.

countrywide strategy. Duplication of projects with similar methodologies and objectives did not only produce a dramatic waste of resources, but also projected a shadow of inefficiency over the whole donor-recipient relationship. In turn, this increased the instances of harsh competition between governmental agencies and NGOs at the national and local levels, which temporarily detached the process of funds allocation from an efficiency-based logic.

More recently, however, in an attempt to reverse such a dangerous trend, the problem started being discussed, and solutions were proposed.[25] In 2010, donors and the Kyrgyz government agreed on the need to share best practices and program approaches at a sector-level (so-called sector wide approaches, or SWAps). As a first step, and as a pilot experience, the major donors in the health sector signed an agreement with the Ministry of Health to establish a program-wide approach ("Health SWAp").[26] In addition, international donors and the Kyrgyz government developed a Joint Country Support Strategy (JCSS) for the Kyrgyz Republic, which presents the core strategy of seven development partners to support the country's development agenda for the period 2007-2010.[27] The JCSS deals with the environment, as well as agriculture and rural development and governance issues, and thus represents a fundamental tool for a better coordination of donors' efforts and interventions in these areas, including water resources management.[28]

In sum, the role of external actors in Kyrgyzstan has been generally beneficial in that it has provided financial resources, expertise, technology, d know-how, leading to the initiation and implementation of projects and actions on the rational and more sustainable use and allocation of water resources, especially for irrigation purposes. At the same time, it cannot be possibly argued that international organizations and donors impose their approach on the national reality; their projects are always negotiated with governmental authorities in line with the development strategy and priority actions of the country, and implementation is often delegated to local NGOs,

[25] Ibid.
[26] Interview with UNICEF representative (« WASH Project »), Osh, October 17th, 2011.
[27] The JCSS has been developed as a joint effort of: the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank Group (WBG), the United Nations Agencies, the Government of Germany, and the European Commission. The International Monetary Fund joined the JCSS in 2009. For further information and for a copy of the JCSS document, see: http://www.donors.kg/en/jcss/ [last accessed: November 3, 2011].
[28] Author interviews with international donors, Bishkek, October 2011.

which have a more direct knowledge of the territory and its necessities.[29] However, without a significant country-based coordination and control over these activities, the risks are that: a) the presence of external actors gives rise to competition between aid recipients, resulting in projects not being planned and commissioned according to principles of efficiency and sustainability, and/or on the basis of real needs; b) initiatives coming from external actors are not coordinated, and either duplicate each other, or target only some specific areas/actors, leaving others behind – piecemeal approach; and c) external actors will continue indefinitely 'baby-sitting' the government in performing its responsibilities in terms of water resources management. Especially in the current context, which is notoriously characterized by political instability, it is not clear how long it will take before the national and local capacity (both in financial, human, and technological terms) will be effectively developed to take over the role that has, so far, being played by international organizations.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis that is here presented points at a number of reasons that would seem to daunt the capacity of the Kyrgyz water governance system to effectively introduce measures aiming at its decentralization and hence at the broader participation of stakeholders in water resources management. More specifically, the interviews emphasized the fact that financial constraints, political volatility, corruption and an excessive presence of external actors determined a permanent situation of horizontal fragmentation. This, in turn, has not only resulted in unclear mandates and distribution of functions across scales, but has also meant that separate authorities are responsible for the various water uses; for example, water for irrigation purposes is managed by WUAs, which, however, do not deal with drinking water and sanitation services. In principle, this differentiation of competences should not represent an issue; but since little monitoring and communication mechanisms are established, the system ends up being highly dysfunctional. In addition, the persistent underfunding of WUAs and other local government bodies weakens their overall efficiency, leaving a serious gap in terms of water resources management right at the level in which most of the competences should instead be concentrated. This results, in many instances, in

[29] Author interviews with international donors and local NGOs, Bishkek, October 2011.

WUAs loosing the trust of water users, with consequent lower levels of participation of concerned stakeholders in the decision-making process, and finally their overall un-legitimacy and non-sustainability. More generally, a strong reorganization of the system, which would clarify roles and responsibilities, is required, together with a way to integrate social externalities such as health and gender issues, and to resolve the question of payment of irrigation services, which is still burdening poor farmers thus increasing the potential for conflict.

On the basis of the abovementioned observations, and drawing from the needs and reflections that were communicated by interviewees, the following recommendations are proposed in order to improve the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the Kyrgyz water governance framework:

- ✓ Active participation of all concerned stakeholders (water managers and users in different sectors) must be guaranteed through effective and solid institutions at the national and local levels – active participation should translate into establishing the required conditions to allow every individual/community/user category having their interests represented, and being able to express their needs, complaints, and propositions in the decision-making process.

- ✓ Local institutions should be guaranteed adequate financial resources, as well as updated technology and assistance to operate and maintain water-related infrastructure; in addition, substantial investments should be directed to making use of the expertise that is already there (for example in the form of traditional knowledge), as well as to providing training to young people that will form the next generation of water managers.

- ✓ A situation of political stability in the country should be guaranteed, *inter alia*, by tackling the problem of corruption; for example, allocating higher salaries to governmental staff at all levels could be a positive strategy towards reducing bribery, as well as guaranteeing the long-term permanence of personnel in Ministries and other state bodies.

- ✓ The role and interventions of external actors in the country should be better coordinated and follow a country-wide and comprehensive development strategy that gives priority to rational and sustainable water resources management; in addition, precise timing and modalities for the transfer of capacities and competences to national and local actors should be set, following adequate capacity-building and training activities that must hence become constitutive parts of all projects in the field of water resources management.

These recommendations play a particularly important role in the context of current and future climatic changes, which will affect Kyrgyzstan both by determining increased situations of water scarcity (especially in the long-term) and by augmenting the frequency and intensity of disastrous extreme events (especially in the short-term). In this sense, effective water resources management must coincide with building the capacity of the system to respond to the increased uncertainty that these changes will

bring about. Decentralization, by 'disaggregating' the water system into its various components and thus enhancing its flexibility to respond to sudden modifications of the external environment, will be key. However, if it has not to bring more damages than benefits, it will have to be carried out in a sustainable and rational way, following a well-designed plan that provides for and guarantees the active participation of all concerned stakeholders.

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## Annex 1: List of Interviews

| No. | REGION | SECTOR | INSTITUTION | TYPE/LEVEL | ACTIVITIES | DATE AND TIME OF THE INTERVIEW | INTERVIEW TYPE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | Zoï Environment Network | IO | AD, CC, ED, EP, ER | Geneva, June 1st, 2011 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **2** | Bishkek | Dom | World Bank | IO | AG, ED, FIS, OM, TRA | Bishkek, October 6th, 2011 h:15.00-15.45 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **3** | Bishkek | Agr | National Center for Mountain Regions Development of Kyrgyz Republic | NAT | AD, AG, CC, EP, INF, LM, TRA | Bishkek, October 5th, 2011h: 14.00-15.00 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **4** | Bishkek | Agr | Institute of Ecology and Applied Sciences/Osh Technological University | RES | ER, INF, TRA | Bishkek, October 5th, 2011 h: 15.00-15.30 | Face-to-face (RUS) |
| **5** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | CAREC | REG | AD, CC, EP, ER, LOB, TRA | Bishkek, October 10th, 2011 h: 11.50-12.20 | Skype (EN) |
| **6** | Kyrgyzstan | Agr | Helvetas | IO | AD, AG, CC, EP, LM, OM, TRA | Bishkek, October 10th, 2011 h: 14.50-16.00 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **7** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) | IO | AD, CC, ED, FIS, INF, OM | Bishkek, October 11th, 2011 h: 11.00-11.45 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **8** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | World Bank | IO | AD, CC, FIS, INF, OM, RM | Bishkek, October 11th, 2011 h: 15.00-15.45 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **9** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | State Committee on Water Economy and Amelioration | NAT | FIS, INF, OM, WM | Bishkek, October 11th, 2011 h: 09.30-10.15 | Face-to-face (RUS) |
| **10** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry | NAT | EP, FIS, INF, LM, OM, WM | Bishkek, October 7th, 2011 h:10.00-10.45 | Face-to-face (RUS) |
| **11** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | OECD | IO | AD, CC, ED, FIS, INF, LOB, TRA | Bishkek, October 13th, 2011 h:20.00-20.45 | Skype (EN) |
| **12** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | Civic Environmental Foundation UNISON | NGO | AD, AG, CC, EP, INF, LOB, TRA | Bishkek, October 14th, 2011 h: 16.00-16.45 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **13** | Osh | Gen | Osh BDWI | PROV | EP, FIS, INF, OM | Osh, October 17th, 2011 h: 9.30-10.15 | Face-to-face (RUS) |
| **14** | Osh | Agr | Osh BDWI | PROV | FIS, INF, OM, WM | Osh, October 17th, 2011 h: 10.30-11.00 | Face-to-face (RUS) |
| **15** | Osh | Gen | ACTED | IO | AD, ED, EP, FIS, INF, OM, RM, TRA | Osh, October 17th, 2011 h: 13.00-13.45 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **16** | Osh | Dom | UNICEF, WASH Project (Project on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) | IO | FIS, INF, LOB, OM, TRA | Osh, October 17th, 2011 h: 18.00-19.15 | Face-to-face (EN) |

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| **17** | Jalal-Abat | Agr | Rural Advisory Services Jalal-Abat | LOC | AG, FIS, INF, LOB | Jalal-Abat, October 18th, 2011 h: 9.00-10.00 | Face-to-face (KYR) |
| **18** | Jalal-Abat | Agr | Rural Advisory Services Jalal-Abat | LOC | AD, AG, CC, EP, INF, LM, OM, TRA | Jalal-Abat, October 18th, 2011 h: 10.00-11.00 | Face-to-face (KYR) |
| **19** | Jalal-Abat | Agr | Water User Association (WUA), Jalal-Abad | WU | AD, AG, FIS, LM, OM, WM | Jalal-Abat, October 18th, 2011 h: 11.30-13.00 | Focus Group (KYR) |
| **20** | Nookat | Agr | Water User Association (Abshyr Tany) | LOC | AD, AG, FIS, LM, OM, WM | Bazar-Korgon, October 19th, 2011 h: 9.00-10.30 | Face-to-face (KYR) |
| **21** | Nookat | Agr | Water User Association (Abshyr Tany) | WU | AG, LM, OM, WM | Bazar-Korgon, October 19th, 2011 h: 10.30-11.00 | Focus group (KYR) |
| **22** | Nookat | Agr | Rural Advisory Services | LOC | AD, AG, CC, EP, INF, LM, OM, TRA | Bazar-Korgon, October 19th, 2011 h: 11.00-11.40 | Face-to-face (RUS) |
| **23** | Kyzyl Kia | Agr | Public Foundation “Taian” | NGO | AG, ED, EP, INF, LM, TRA, WM | Kyzyl Kia, October 19th, 2011 h: 12.20-12.15 | Face-to-face (RUS) |
| **24** | Ferghana Valley | Dom | Central Asian Alliance for Water | REG | AD, CC, ER, INF, LOB, TRA | Osh, October 19th, 2011 h: 14.50-15.30 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **25** | Kyrgyzstan | Tour | USAID | IO | ED, FIS, INF, TOU, TRA | Bishkek, October 28th, 2011 h: 15.00-15.45 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **26** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | OSCE | IO | AD, CC, ED, EP, FIS, INF, RM, TRA, WM | Bishkek, November 1st, 2011 h: 9.30-10.00 | Face-to-face (EN) |
| **27** | Kyrgyzstan | Gen | Ministry of Natural Resources | NAT | EP, FIS, INF, LM, OM, RM, WM | Bishkek, November 3, 2011 h: 9.00-9.45 | Face-to-face (RUS) |