

# Functional Frameworks for River Basin Governance

by Isnugroho and Tue Kell Nielsen

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## Summary

Many new, significant challenges – and many new and equally significant opportunities – are enhancing the need for basin-level governance: Water security, food security, and water-dependent livelihoods must be supported by unprecedented background of urbanizations and new lifestyles, not to speak of a changing climate.

This requires far-reaching decisions, timely implementation and (often substantial) investments in water supply and sewage infrastructure; irrigation; storage capacity; flood protection; and morphological management. Such decisions have particular inter-sector implications, increasing the importance of basin-level dialogue and coordination to share a finite amount of water, supplies and services, achieve effective management of the aquatic environment, and to develop the required knowledge-base.

Basin organizations are characterized by their *mandate*; *authority*; and *capacity* to meet the needs of the stakeholders in the basin. To be effective, the RBO must have a suitable harmony between these three dimensions.

A distinction can be made between three types of RBO:

- *The council (or committee)*, often with governmental and nongovernmental representatives;
- *The public RBO*, which is an integrated part of the government system; and
- *The corporate RBO*, owned by the state but with the some degree of autonomy and the status of a legal entity.

These types may in fact operate side by side, and support each other, as convincingly demonstrated in examples in Indonesia and the Philippines.

The following strengths of these three types are recognized:

- *The council (or committee)* is established to expand and support interagency coordination and stakeholder collaboration, and generally has strengths in the processes of facilitation and conflict resolution. Its performance is related to its ability to foster joint, broadly accepted recommendations. If it performs well it can have a high degree of informal authority, for example in connection with water allocation.
- *The public RBO*, being an integrated part of the government system, has a strong legitimacy, which is important if the RBO is involved in water allocation, regulation and enforcement. If institutionally housed in a ministry, it will be in a good position to liaise with that ministry in connection with policy formulation and planning, but may be somewhat more distant from other ministries and agencies.
- The strengths of *the corporate RBO* are derived from its autonomy and revenue generating ability. Provided that it is in a position to implement its own plans and

development initiatives (within its mandate and financial capacity), it is able to respond faster to needs and opportunities. Also, it can feature a relative strengthening of the basin-level perspective as compared with the public RBO (where funds are allocated in a broader perspective).

How should governments determine which RBO model is appropriate? The type of RBO must be appropriate for the stage of development in the basin, and reflect the mandate it is to be assigned, and the related authority and capacity it is to be allowed to develop:

- Strategic planning and scoping suggests an advisory council type of RBO (with broad participation but no formal authority) may be appropriate. Such a body can also provide valuable guidance on water allocation.
- Water allocation, regulation, (and perhaps enforcement) may indicate a public type of RBO (with high degree of formal authority).
- Supplies, services and infrastructural development may indicate a corporate type of RBO (with high capacity to make and implement decisions and collect service charges from users).

Some overarching conditions for successful RBO performance are shared by all three types. These are somewhat related:

- Political support and commitment;
- Good relations with water users and other stakeholders; and
- Good leadership and human resources.