

Alicia A. Hayman

Policy Statement for the Barbados +10 Conference in Mauritius

Watershed management, while making strides in water quality management in Jamaica, still struggles with becoming part of the overall system of management in the country. Watershed management is best achieved at the local level. In Jamaica, watershed management is being achieved through Local Watershed Management Committees (LWMC) and other local level groups including Local Forest Management Committees, Local Fisheries Management Councils and Water User Associations.

At the same time, in the past ten years or so there has been a move towards decentralization of authority to local government agencies. However, decentralization has been undertaken without the appropriate mechanisms to allow them to carry out their responsibilities. Among these are, the capacity to carry out watershed management functions as well as the levels of financial support to facilitate and sustain these efforts. The degree of local involvement in watershed management depends on the mode of decentralization adopted. In the cases of deconcentration and delegation, local authorities will have relatively smaller supportive and secondary roles in managing natural resources. Under true devolution, local authorities move towards a central role in natural resource management decision making processes, with a concomitant assignment of expenditure authority at the local-level. Devolution of authority can therefore result in a reconstitution of power to lie in the hands of those making the decisions within the LWMC.

While there has been a move towards formalizing LWMCs no official recognition has been given to these groups. As such they do not have the power to carry out their mandates in an effective way.

There is generally no standard in establishing these LWMCs as legal entities. There have been efforts towards registration of LWMCs under mechanisms such as the Companies Act and the Friendly Societies Act. The National Integrated Watershed Management Council (NIWMC) exists as the umbrella group for LWMCs. There is a need for clarification of the role of the NIWMC, which will also help to give more credence to the development of LWMCs. At the same time, there needs to be some process of registration to legalize the LWMCs under the NIWMC, so that the local level groups can undertake their individual management responses which will feed into the NIWMC towards an integrated and holistic approach.

Decision making has long been top-down, with a one-way feed of information from the central government agencies to the local levels. Policy and management options have thus been prescriptive, with little consideration of the context of the issues and their requisite solutions. There are numerous models in decision making that could be appropriate for various contexts. The literature shows that the Garbage Can model developed by Cohen (1973) is one such appropriate decision-making model especially as it relates to the efforts at the watershed scale. This model allows for constant iterations towards an adaptive form of management. It is more of a process of learning by doing. As new information becomes available (whether local or scientific) the strategies are modified to incorporate the new information. This allows continuous strengthening of project and programs to suit the needs of the specific contexts.

The utilization of a watershed perspective towards the management of water resources is a useful tool geared at sustainable use and conservation of the resource. However, while the watershed perspective utilizes natural boundaries for the management of water resources, other national policies utilize political boundaries in carrying out the respective actions. As such, there is a general tendency towards sector-based management within specified political boundaries using electoral divisions. However, the watershed perspective focuses on area-based management, either at the watershed, sub-watershed or even community levels. This can also accommodate all components of the system, including the economic, social and environmental, establishing concerns and issues and the appropriate responses in an integrated fashion.

In order to bring this to a level where it can be meaningful, it is therefore vital that all Ministries and agencies develop their action plans and programs around the watershed, rather than by sector. In doing so, management can be more holistic, in fact, more geared towards concerted action which can also ensure that there is no duplication of efforts, especially with the scarce financial resources available. The watershed concept is already being used in numerous agencies, headed by the National Environment and Planning Agency. Notwithstanding this, there needs to be an agreement for its use in all sectors so that it can be integrated in all national policies, planning and management initiatives. While numerous agencies and organizations recognize the watershed concept and are in support of activities of LWMCs, this support has not been shown by a portion of funds allocated towards watershed management initiatives. It would be indeed prudent for agencies to begin to devote not only human and technical resources towards watershed management initiatives, but to also devote some financial resources to help to undertake the varied tasks associated with the protection and improvement of water quality.

Alternatively, during the formation of the LWMCs, there needs to be ongoing efforts at raising funds to ensure the sustainability of the efforts of the various groups. Generally, it is seen that group formation and development are both spin-offs of international donor-agency funding, and as soon as these externally funded projects and programs come to a close, there seems to be a struggle to sustain the efforts gained and undertaken by the initial projects.

Many agencies realize that there is a move towards a more participatory approach towards the management of natural resources. While they are beginning to realize also that the traditional top-down approach towards the management of natural resources has failed to deal with the complex watershed issues, there seems to be a struggle in acceptance of a more flexible, adaptive approach which allows local stakeholders, especially those who live and use the watershed resources to be involved in the processes and decisions over the life of the program. Most agencies have tended to view local participation as information dissemination, acquisition, consultation or even public awareness and education. These forms of participation are very low rungs on the ladder of participation and strategically focus on specific stages of the process, and thus limits the role of local stakeholders in the decision-making processes. Additionally, while government agencies have an understanding of the concept of local participation in resource management, there is a tendency towards keeping with the traditional roles of government agencies both at the national and local levels. Instead of a move towards the new roles of government in natural resources management, there is a conflict with the old

ways of thinking through the many years of experience by agency personnel. There needs to be some overhaul towards the transition towards a new governance system especially in natural resources management to incorporate local stakeholders not only in action but also in decision-making at every level. With this there needs to be continuous capacity development at the local level and also development in areas such as conflict resolution and collaborative management and facilitation and the agency levels.

For water quality management to be effective, there has to be an overall move away from the traditional top-down approach to management towards one that is participatory, flexible and adaptive. The use of the watershed as a unit for management seems to be an appropriate one especially where natural resources are concerned. However, for this to be effective there has to be a consensus towards watershed management. The focus on the watershed has to be at every level, especially where traditionally sector-based management has been the order of the day.

The move towards a bottom-up approach or a mix signifies a shift towards a new paradigm in resource management in general. This new paradigm includes the involvement of all stakeholders, who have the power to undertake the activities agreed upon by the LWMC. Horizontal and vertical linkages are indeed important. Communication between organizations at the same level and with those at a higher level is vital in the management of natural resources and once information is continually fed along these lines, there is also greater power to carry out functions.

Local capacity hinges on various factors including information, financial and human resources, power relationships, group activities in the watershed areas such as NGOs, which help to develop social capital, and technical and local knowledge to inform the management actions over time. The devolution of not only responsibilities but also financial resources to local authorities is also important to the proper management of water resources, in a sustainable manner.

An integrated approach to water management ensures that decisions and plans are in balance and are holistic. The watershed approach allows people who must live in the watershed areas to take control of their lives and the management of their environment. It also encourages volunteerism as people become stewards of the precious resources.

The management of water quality using the watershed as the unit for management hinges on the participation of local people and as such depends on the social capital and the local capacity of local groups to organize and management around a common interest such as water. Adding to this, evaluation using institutional analysis provides information on the factors that contribute to and/or constrain success in water quality management.

These policy options can work in tandem with other topic areas, as the integrated approach takes all factors into consideration. Also, a watershed approach is area-based and this also ensures that all factors and components are considered.