



The Performance of River Basin Organizations – A Comparative Study of River Basin Organizations in Namibia, Indonesia and Brazil

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Since the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin in 1992, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) has emerged as driving concept behind the management of water resources. For most of the 1990s the discussions regarding IWRM as the guiding concept behind water resources management has been rather conceptual in nature. In recent years however, the discussion has increasingly shifted towards actual implementation of the widely discussed principles and concepts. When focusing on implementation of water policies and strategies to implement IWRM, it is unavoidable to consider river basins as logical units for water resources management (Jaspers 2003). This implies viewing Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) as a means of implementing IWRM. Or as Hooper (2006) concludes: IRBM is now “recognized as a tool, perhaps the most appropriate tool, to deliver IWRM in the basin scale”.

If IRBM is the most appropriate ‘tool’ to deliver IWRM at a basin scale, then River Basin Organizations (RBOs) are increasingly being promoted as the vehicle by which this tool should be implemented. In the past decades, river basin organizations have become “a central component of the most recent evolution of the framework that defines how water is managed at the river basin or strategic level” (Makin et al., 2004; see also Radosevich and Olson 1999).

As the discussions have shifted from concepts to implementation and RBOs have grown to become a central component in the institutional framework for water man-

agement, their functioning and performance has increasingly been the topic of discussion. Concerns regarding the performance of RBOs are increasing. Illustrative is a recent workshop held between staff of the World Bank and selected external experts. The main question posed by the World Bank staff and discussed with the experts was: “How come that RBOs to date have not met expectations”? (World Bank 2003). This question implies that the performance of RBOs has been below the expected norms and, as such, the implementation of IWRM is proving more difficult than perhaps imagined.

In this paper, an analysis is undertaken of the constraints and drivers of performance of RBOs in three countries using multiple performance assessment frameworks. By undertaking a comparative study of RBOs in Namibia, Brazil and Indonesia the question first posed by the World Bank concerning the disappointing performance of many RBOs will be addressed.