Ignite Speech: A Regional Approach to Water Diplomacy

The Politics of Regional Water Diplomacy

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Regions are socially constructed

• We need regional approaches — many challenges and collective action dilemmas are transboundary

• Forget ‘natural’ regions — all regions (including transboundary waters) are constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed by social actors

• External and internal actors often endorse different regional imaginations, spaces & governance mechanisms (for different purposes)
Power and Politics Matter

• A Regional Approach to Water involves winners and losers
• Win-win & positive-sum solutions difficult in practice
• Benefits often asymmetric and uneven
• National interests & national sovereignty may prevent regional cooperation & implementation
• Don’t idealise Water Diplomacy & Regional Cooperation & Regional Organizations (ROs)
• Don’t ignore ‘the dark forces’ of regional cooperation and integration — powerful actors instrumentalize ROs, RBOs and other actors
Institutions and Organizations Matter — but knowledge gap about what works and why

- Big “implementation gap” in intergovernmental ROs and RBOs
- Multipurpose ROs & RECs good for diplomacy and agenda-setting but not for implementation
- Some ROs and RECs deliberately rhetorical to preserve status quo and/or national interests
- Many multipurpose and ROs poor at involving non-state actors
- RBOs and sector-specific organizations (i.e. the functional-technocratic ‘unit’) often lack political leverage and relevance
- Forget subsidiarity and finding the perfect ‘unit’ — functioning governance is often multi-scalar and ‘complex’ (possibly context-specific)
- Align regional with national — strengthen capacities for national & local implementation
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