Governing water(s) as a common: Innovative experiences of coproduction in Southeast Asia

A deep dive exploring empirical and theoretical perspectives

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Co-organizers: Center for Social Development Studies (CSDS), Chulalongkorn University; Chulalongkorn University UNESCO Chair in Resource Governance and Futures Literacy; SustainAsia; Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC); Institute of Political Sciences (Sciences Po) Toulouse; and Heinrich Böll Foundation

Introduction

Inclusive and just water security is widely recognized as principal challenge in the era of the Anthropocene. Water insecurity affects the livelihoods of both rural and urban populations in Southeast Asia, and the wider the Global South.

In this context of water insecurity and degradation of water quality, water governance models have been circulated worldwide (for instance, Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM); Public Private Partnerships (PPPs); the water-energy-climate nexus). They are often considered from a sectorial perspective, including differentiating water resources on the one hand and drinking water services on the other, and in a centralized and top-down way, even if the participation of all stakeholders is recommended. These centralized models when implemented have shown their limits as they rarely take the complexity of local socio-ecological and political contexts into account.

Social science scholarship, ranging from 'sustainability scientists' (e.g. Spangenberg, 2011) to 'political ecologists' (e.g. Robbins, 2012) have argued for new approaches towards thinking about water and its governance that is more sensitive to issues of power relations and diverse forms of knowledge in decision-making, more dynamic in the context of various forms of uncertainty, and that foregrounds addressing various forms of inequality. Simultaneously, social movements and civil society have also argued the need to address water injustices with inclusive, innovative and just approaches. While there is a diversity of alternatives being proposed, 'water as a commons' and the transformative practices of 'commoning' are increasingly recognized as necessary for a societal, socio-economic and ecological paradigm shift towards water. The idea of communing also refers to 'shared governance' processes as a path for a renewal of collective action, involving grass root organisations, civil society and public authorities.

This deep dive and accompanying public forum aim to share experience and analysis on innovative practices of knowledge-governance coproduction for water commoning in the rural and urban contexts, as well as at the local, national and transnational scales, and - importantly - the interconnections between them. It intends to explore how water as a commons and processes of commoning enrich both political ecology theoretical frameworks and public policy in water(s) governance. Particular attention will be paid to the role of civil society and social movements in the coproduction process based on their innovative water governance experiences. The implications of multiple 'water worlds' will also be explored, namely that water itself is always embedded in ecological socio-political and cultural contexts that produce diverse meanings and values of water between different societal groups who may then contest these values when translated into policy and practice.

Two main deep dive themes will be discussed during the workshop.

<u>Our first deep dive theme</u> will focus on the multiplicity of commons and commoning practices within the Mekong River basin. On transboundary rivers the commons can be viewed as multi-scaled, and the relationship between local and transboundary biophysical commons needs to be carefully examined materially and in terms of their governance (Hirsch, 2020). A contemporary flashpoint of hydropolitics on the river has been the planning, construction and operation of large hydropower dams that transform many dimensions of common pool resources, including migratory fisheries, sediment movement and water quality, as well as dynamic river properties such as seasonal flood pulses. The degradation of common pool resources and the consequences for riparian community livelihoods have been understood as an act of commons enclosure (Santasombat, 2011), of 'water grabbing' (Matthews, 2012). Water governance towards sustaining the benefits of the commons has often led to the call for nested governance approaches (Ostrom et al., 1999), yet Hirsch (2020) also warns that multi-scaled water governance – especially at the transnational level – can privilege the role of states. Rather, he proposes that multiscaled commons need to be understood as relational, rather than hierarchical, whereby higher scaled governance systems connect to and depend upon effective local commons governance. This in turn draws attention to practices of community-commoning (Amin and Howell, 2016), whereby social relations are produced through the activities of creating and sustaining resource commons, such as community fisheries or community forestry, of which there are many examples. Similar, network activities among civil society, community-based organizations, academics and others that seek to influence water governance to maintain commons at higher scales, including the transboundary level can also be understood as community-commoning activities.

<u>Our second deep dive theme</u> will focus on urban issues. The concepts of commons and commoning have rarely been considered in urban studies, especially in the context of the Global South. Some scholars have analyzed the land tenure issue in informal settlements through these concepts (as in the case of community land trust systems or housing cooperatives) but little research exists exploring how urban water as a common can support a more inclusive city. In these deep dive sessions, we will address the issues from both conceptual and empirical points of view. Considering urban inequalities in relation to water access and water infrastructure, and urban water political ecology, combines the concerns of ecology, society and a broadly defined political economy. How can an approach in terms of commons-commoning be articulated through a political ecology lens to discuss specific case studies in Asian urban contexts? Another issue concerns water access inequalities and urban policies. In the context of urban sprawl, the centralized water network may not reach suburb areas in the future. New socio-technical regimes are emerging as off-grid decentralized solutions for water access and bottled water. Some donors consider these innovations as alternatives to reach the SDGs, but to what extent have equity

objectives been taken into account? These new socio-technical regimes pose institutional, organizational and technical changes, involving the local populations and taking into account local knowledge, especially in precarious and informal neighborhoods where inhabitants have had to adapt to environmental (flooding), economic, urbanistic and social constraints. Considering water services as commons has been discussed in the literature, linked to the concept of coproduction (Ostrom, 1996), but to what extent can the issues of coproduction and commoning be addressed in the contemporary context of Asian cities? What is the role of local associations ("communities"), NGOs, academics, and social entrepreneurs in these coproduction processes to support innovative urban water policies? What is the role of facilitators in this process of coproduction and "shared governance"?

The following questions will be addressed during deep dive sessions according to the 2 main topics (transboundary rivers; urban water governance), with groups organized for each topic.

- How is water commoning and water as a commons currently understood among scholars, civil society and other practitioners?
- What are the current state of knowledge and trends on: waters as a common; commoning processes; and links between coproduction and cocreation of knowledge in water governance; and emerging innovations and experiences.
- What are the experiences and case studies of knowledge, socio-technical, organizational, institutional innovations in water as a commons and commoning as a process in various rural and urban contexts, and what do they reveal about the contested meaning and values of water itself?
- Considering coproduction as a factor of change, what is the role of facilitators – such as academics or civil society – in these processes? How are power relationships addressed in the process of coproduction, what are the risks, and how do they block or ignite transformation?
- What are the most promising approaches towards widening the implementation and institutionalization of water as a commons that are inclusive and socially just? What are the barriers to be overcome? What does this mean for reimagining the future of water (as a commons)?

Deep dive participants will be asked to consider the various cross-cutting issues that relate to governing water as a common and applying co-production and co-creation approaches, including gender issues and other intersectional aspects, as well as policy impacts, and how water governance intersects with pressing livelihood, climate resilience, disaster preparedness and other environmental challenges.

The deepdive is based on Chatham House rules. A short public summary reflecting the main findings of deepdive will be prepared.

Agenda

Day 1: 26 October 2022

Time	Session
8:30 - 9:00	Arrival / Welcome
9:00 - 9:30	Introduction & self-introductions of all participants
9:30 - 9:45	**Framing :** (Re)thinking about water as a commons/ practices of commoning, and the meaning of coproduction
9:45 - 10:00	Synthesis reflection and full group discussion
10:00 - 10:45	**Deep dive breakout 1:** How is water commoning and water as a commons currently understood among scholars, civil society and other practitioners?
10:45 - 11:00	*Break*
11:00 - 11:45	Report back 1: Rapporteur summary and cross-stream connections and synthesis
11:45 – 12:30	**Deep Dive Breakout 2**: What are the current state of knowledge and trends on: waters as a common; commoning processes; and links between coproduction and cocreation of knowledge in water governance; and emerging innovations and experiences.
12:30 - 1:30	*Lunch*
1:30 - 2:00 pm	Report back 2: Rapporteur summary and cross-stream connections and synthesis
2:00 – 2:45 pm	**Deep Dive Breakout 3:** What are the experiences and case studies of knowledge, socio-technical, organizational, institutional innovations in water as a commons and commoning as a process in various rural and urban contexts, and what do they reveal about the contested meaning and values of water itself?
2:45 - 3:00	*Break*
3:00 – 3:30 pm	Report back 3: Rapporteur summary and cross-stream connections and synthesis
3:30 – 4:15 pm	**Deep dive breakout 4**: Considering coproduction as a factor of change, what is the role of facilitators – such as academics or civil society – in these processes? How are power relationships addressed in the process of coproduction, what are the risks, and how do they block or ignite transformation?

4:15 – 5:00 Pm	Report back 4: Rapporteur summary and cross-stream connections and synthesis
5:00 - 5:15 pm	Wrap up of day 1
7 PM	*Group evening meal*

Day 2: 27 October 2022

Time	Session
9:00 - 9:30	Check in and introduction to day 2
9:30 - 10:15	**Deep dive breakout 5**: What are the most promising approaches towards widening the implementation and institutionalization of water as a commons that are inclusive and socially just? What are the barriers to be overcome? What does this mean for reimagining the future of water (as a commons)?
10:15 - 10:30	*Break*
10:30 - 11:00	Report back 5: Rapporteur summary and cross-stream connections and synthesis
11:00 – 12:00	**Synthesis discussion and next steps:** Group discussion : What is emerging? Where do we find intersections and tensions in knowledge and practice? How are cross cutting issues of gender inclusion and climate change playing out in the two streams.
12:00 – 12:30	Workshop closing
12:30	Lunch