

Marketplace Idea

European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Ispra, Italy

2 September 2016

People-centric Transboundary River Management and Cooperation

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POLICY CHALLENGE

People at grass-roots level do not always have the necessary information to make informed decisions when government plans to developments in transboundary river basins. The problem is often compounded by literacy levels, especially in rural areas where people still live a traditional lifestyle and are not highly educated. Since people are not well educated they often lack the skills to read, interpret and understand their constitutional rights, which can put them at a disadvantage when governments plan to invest in water management schemes that could negatively effect the community's ability to a secured livelihood (fig. 1). What is also sometimes the situation is that local people living in rural communities are often contending landownership with governments.

The traditional ways of implementing developments in transboundary river basins and managing these eco-system services is through top-down state-centric institutional arrangements and legislative structures. These institutional arrangements are usually in the form of a transboundary river basin commission. The commissions' establishment is usually underpinned by an international treaty, protocol or agreement between the riparian countries. These institutions and legislative arrangements give governments dominion over transboundary river basins and can lead to a particular way of developing these basins (fig 2).

Scientists are employed by governments to investigate the feasibility of development projects, like large hydro-electric power plants. They conduct surveys among the local population in the name of objectivity. The survey data, which can include how people use water resources, and demographic data like literacy levels are supplied to government. Government then decides what is best for the population basing decisions on so-called objectivity and rational cost-benefit analyses. Development decisions are then imposed on local communities in the name of socio-economic development, which often violate the human rights of such communities.

To move away from such a situation where unaccountability is at the order of the day, calls for a people-centric way of managing and developing transboundary river basins. This means that there needs to be a different way of gathering data to be translated into evidence.

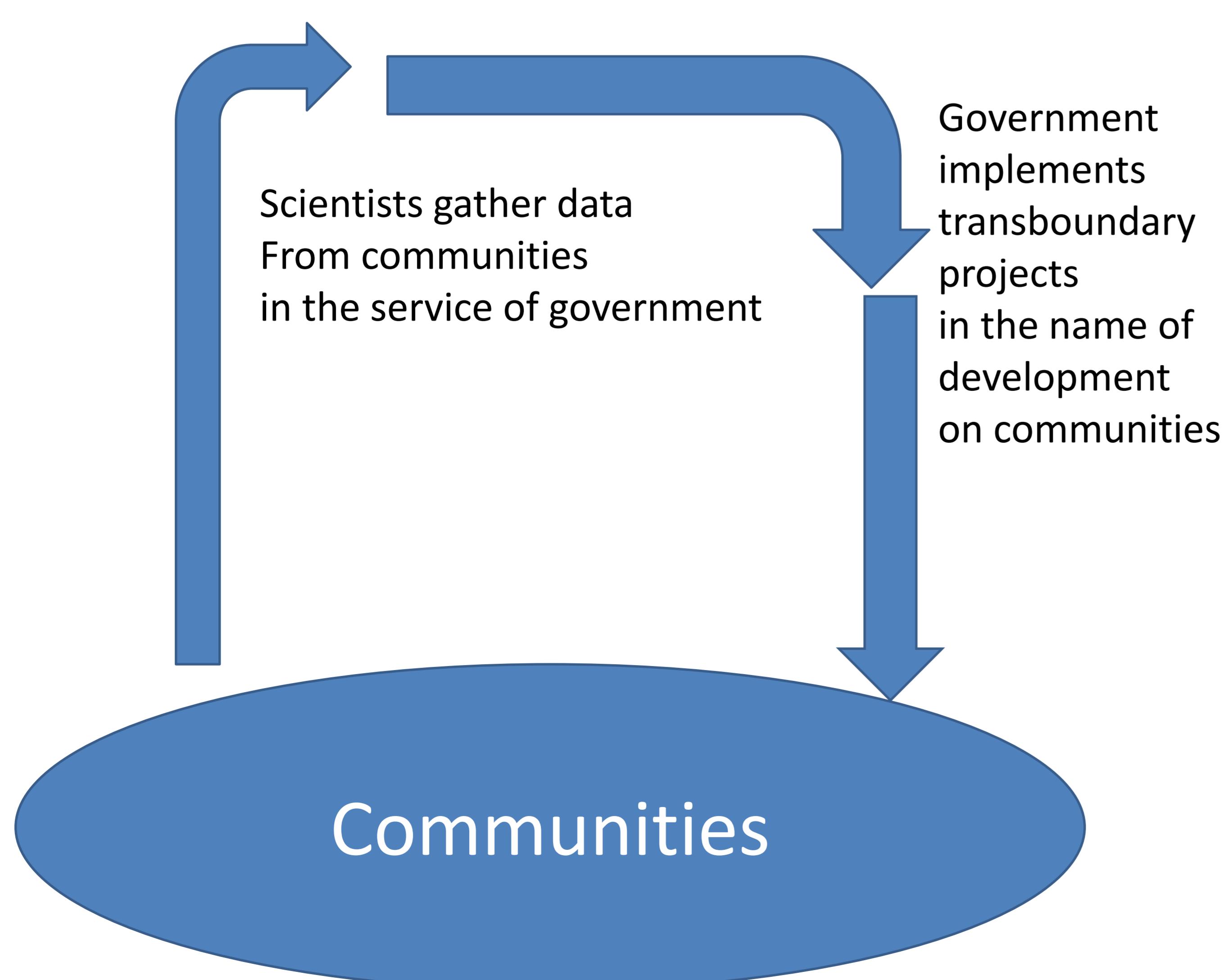


Fig 2. The traditional way of kick starting transboundary river basin development



Fig. 1. People depend on transboundary rivers for a livelihood

Evidence Needed

The first order of business is to do a review of transboundary river basins to ascertain where development projects have led to poverty and human rights abuses.

After we have identified the transboundary river basins, we will do a desktop study to ascertain what the political situation in each riparian state is and the governance structures in place. This can give a sense of the ideological power of the state apparatus and also give an initial assessment of the government's propensity to violate human rights.

We will then identify communities that had bear the brunt of development projects in the past.

We will then make contact with the different communities and particularly their leadership structures to get permission to conduct research in their communities.

We will move away from representative sampling, since this gives a false sense of reality and rather implement purposive sampling through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions.

The questionnaire will be same for all focus groups and interviews. Questions will include:

1. How long have your community lived in this part of the country?
2. To whom does the land, you live on, belong?
3. What role does the land play in your culture?
4. What role does the river play in your culture?
5. What are the ancestors saying about the land's condition?
6. What are the ancestors saying about the river's condition?
7. Where do you get food?
8. Where do you get water?
9. Will the ancestors be angry if lots of water come over their graves?
10. Will the ancestors be angry if lots of water come over the land?
11. What will happen if a dam is build on the river and make it stop flowing?
12. Do you walk over the river to visit your neighbours on the other side?
13. How would you like government to use the land along the river?

These questions will give a sense of how the community value the land and the river and whether they are likely to support or oppose developments on transboundary rivers.