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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Investigating Institutional Arrangements in Groundwater Resources Management in Iran

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Abstract

Globally, there has been a dramatic increase in groundwater use in the past half-century, especially in arid and semi-arid countries. As one of the most arid countries in the world, Iran currently ranks among the top groundwater users globally – in fact, it is estimated that Iranians have already used most of their groundwater reserves. The continued unchecked use of ground water resources may lead to serious problems, and if immediate action is not taken to address the issue, the situation could become disastrous in the near future. Sustainable groundwater resources management is therefore urgent and necessary in Iran.

While there are several reasons for the underlying groundwater crisis in the country, a number of studies show that the groundwater crisis in Iran is an institutional crisis. In this regard, evidence revealed that countries around the world have different institutions at the forefront of groundwater resources management. These institutions supply guidelines for human conduct, while also providing distinctive opportunities for monitoring social behaviour and controlling resources through changes in the institutional environment, in order to shape the way individuals behave within social entities.

Due to the importance of institutional arrangements in groundwater resources management, it is important to examine them in detail. The purpose of this research was therefore to identify the institutions involved in groundwater resources management and to examine the power and interest of each institution based on the Mendelow power and interest matrix. The study was conducted in the western part of Iran, specifically Lorestan Province. The data were collected through observation and interviews with the stakeholders involved (institutions) in groundwater management, and analysed using a stakeholder analysis based on the interests and power held by the actors. The results indicate that there are many stakeholders (institutions) involved in decision-making processes related to groundwater resources management that all play a key role in groundwater management, and their decisions largely determine the success or failure of any groundwater-related policy. Among these institutions, water authorities are the most powerful institution in groundwater resources management, followed by agricultural and environmental authorities. The findings yield public policy for sustainable groundwater management in Iran.

Keywords: Groundwater resources management, institutions, Iran, Mendelow power and interest matrix, stakeholder analysis