

Water Governance Perspectives on the Urmia Lake Restoration Process: Challenges and Achievements

Authors : Jalil Salimi, Mandana Asadi, Naser Fathi

Abstract : Urmia Lake (UL) has undergone a significant decline in water levels, resulting in severe environmental, socioeconomic, and health-related challenges. This paper examines the restoration process of UL from a water governance perspective. By applying a water governance model, the study evaluates the process based on six selected principles: stakeholder engagement, transparency and accountability, effectiveness, equitable water use, adaptation capacity, and water usage efficiency. The dominance of structural and physicalist approaches to water governance has led to a weak understanding of social and environmental issues, contributing to social crises. Urgent efforts are required to address the water crisis and reform water governance in the country, making water-related issues a top national priority. The UL restoration process has achieved significant milestones, including stakeholder consensus, scientific and participatory planning, environmental vision, intergenerational justice considerations, improved institutional environment for NGOs, investments in water infrastructure, transparency promotion, environmental effectiveness, and local issue resolutions. However, challenges remain, such as power distribution imbalances, bureaucratic administration, weak conflict resolution mechanisms, financial constraints, accountability issues, limited attention to social concerns, overreliance on structural solutions, legislative shortcomings, program inflexibility, and uncertainty management weaknesses. Addressing these weaknesses and challenges is crucial for the successful restoration and sustainable governance of UL.

Keywords : evaluation, restoration process, Urmia Lake, water governance, water resource management

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