

Policy failures and policy entrepreneurs

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Who am I?

- ▶ PhD Agricultural and Resource Economics, UC Davis 2008
- ▶ Assistant professor of political economy @ LUC.
- ▶ Books on water scarcity, climate change adaptation
- ▶ Blog on political economy at one-handed-economist.com
- ▶ Papers on international aid, group cooperation, politics of desalination, environmental taxes, land/water grabs, auctions for water, etc.
- ▶ Recent focus on managing collective goods.

Today's prompt

“Overcoming water challenges with sustainable solutions. . .”

. . . will be difficult if your solutions are *too* academic.

In other words, they need to be accessible, understandable, feasible, actionable and acceptable if they are going to replace existing failed policies.

Your checklist

Accessible: Can non-academics get to your papers?

Understandable: Avoid crazy assumptions and jargon.

Feasible: Too many academic “solutions” are not.

Actionable: Ideas need to fit existing institutions.

Acceptable: Ideas cannot offend the powerful.

It takes hard work, extramural partnerships and people skills to turn your ideas into real change.

I'm going to give you some ideas of what's out there.

First, the challenge

Water is a “wicked” problem¹ in a few ways:

- ▶ End of Abundance: Outdated institutions
- ▶ Missing data: No idea of where we are
- ▶ Overlapping private and commons: Winners and losers

A few more words on the commons. . .

¹ “difficult to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize.”

Exclusion determines management

	excludable	non-excludable
rival	private good	common-pool good
non-rival	club good	public good

markets gov't or community
economics *politics*

Water, food and energy security

- My opinion:
- ▶ The “nexus” is a fad not a strategy.
 - ▶ Energy drives climate disruption but rich.
 - ▶ Water is the vector of disruption but valuable.
 - ▶ Food needs water more (end of groundwater!)

Failures: “Mining” water for security that trade could deliver.
Government policies that coordinate simultaneous failure among farmers.

Successes: Anything decentralized.

Water sanitation and ecosystems

- My opinion:
- ▶ The solution to pollution is no longer dilution!
 - ▶ Ecosystems are dying from thermal, chemical (pesticides) and biological (algae) pollution.
 - ▶ Replacing ecosystem services is expensive!
 - ▶ Action may come if men fear losing their fertility (male sperm count already down by 50 percent).

Failures: Many polluters (farmers, cities) are not paying. Ecosystems are barely monitored (let alone managed) and dying rapidly (corals down 50 percent).

Successes: Closing the loop (e.g., Singapore) and rebuilding ecosystems (Hedwige polder)

Weather extremes and hazards

- My opinion:
- ▶ Climate disruption is going to make everything worse, everywhere, i.e., bigger hurricanes, longer droughts, higher storm surges, etc.
 - ▶ We need to retreat (as our ancestors did) rather than “defend” doomed infrastructure and cities.
 - ▶ The rich do not like this and will get politicians to protect them with your money.

Failures: New Orleans “build back stronger,” Jakarta’s seawall, etc.

Successes: Early warning systems, spending on training and relocation (New Jersey conversion into wetlands).

Bridging from science to implementation

- My opinion:
- ▶ Academic publishing \neq communication.
 - ▶ Academics need to talk with practitioners.
 - ▶ Practitioners lack strategy. Stuck with BAU.

Failures: Most economists (fat-tailed risks). IPCC (too conservative). US Army Corps.

Successes: Deltares, et al. when they are working on risk not superstitions of paying clients (NOLA).

Bottom line

- ▶ Water-related topics are all getting worse simultaneously.
- ▶ They are hard to manage due to outdated institutions, mismatched costs and benefits, and an ongoing failure to prioritize long range planning over short-term consumption.
- ▶ We are all likely to have more difficult lives, but communities that organize themselves for sustainability will be better off.
- ▶ Those who are worse off will invade, attack and depend on heal from those who are doing (relatively) better.

Good luck!