

# El Niño platforms: participatory disaster response in Peru

**Jeroen Warner** Project Co-ordinator, Irrigation and Water Engineering Group, Wageningen University, Netherlands and **Maria Teresa Oré** Sociologist, Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE), Peru

*Climate change is expected to lead to greater extremes (droughts and floods) in river regimes around the world.<sup>1</sup> While the number of major calamities is predicted to rise, the efforts of the public sector, experts and local stakeholders are badly coordinated. Consequently, aid does not reach target groups, resulting in unnecessary losses. Hence, there is a need for more participatory and integrative approaches. To ensure a more concerted response to climate-induced disasters, stakeholders could coordinate and negotiate within Multi-Stakeholder Platforms. Such roundtables are increasingly being established for vision-building and integrated water resource management, but could be employed in disaster management as well. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of participation, this article trace the rise of and the problems facing two 'El Niño' platforms: one in Ica, a city on the Peruvian coast that flooded unexpectedly in January 1998, and one in Ayacucho, which saw a climate change-induced drought around the same time. The issue of internal and external legitimacy receives particular emphasis.*

**Keywords:** drought, flood, legitimacy, Multi-Stakeholder Platforms, participation, Peru

## Introduction: coordination of disasters

While a new and exciting perspective in the North, 'living with the flood' is nothing new in the South. People live with the river as a matter of course. The most meaningful disaster response is still the one that occurs locally. There are many actions people can take to lessen the impact of a flood event, and an array of technical, economic and social coping strategies exist to help them get by (see, for example, Chan and Parker, 1996). Local actors, however, cannot be expected to work alone to provide the affected population with adequate food, shelter and recovery materials. Aid organisations and central governments, though, often lack detailed knowledge of the social and physical infrastructure of a specific area. Much would be gained by coordinating relief efforts with local governments and local voluntary bodies.

Climate change is expected to produce more hydrological extremes (droughts and floods) and greater variability in river regimes around the world.<sup>2</sup> While the number of major calamities is expected to rise, the efforts of the public sector, experts and locals—Hilhorst's three 'domains of knowledge and action' (Hilhorst, 2003)—are frequently uncoordinated or under coordinated. Consequently, aid does not reach target groups, resulting in unnecessary losses. The coordination of disaster response, then, remains a daunting challenge to the actors involved. Case studies suggest that the way

in which disaster relief is frequently organised and coordinated can make things even worse. The study by Christie and Hanlon (2001) of the unusually heavy floods in Mozambique in 2000, for instance, suggests that governmental, international and local relief efforts were badly coordinated and at times were counterproductive, cancelling each other out. Trucks carrying relief materials and food were stranded before they reached their intended recipients, and those without access to a political network found themselves at a disadvantage when it came to acquiring compensation. A swift examination of tsunami relief in Sri Lanka by Wijers<sup>3</sup> indicates that coordination between local and international aid organisations and government agencies was perfunctory, with several bodies preferring to keep their cards close to their chest and to trust only their own networks.

There is clearly a lot to be gained from better coordination. Coordination between actors generates a degree of complexity that is starting to become of increasing interest to disaster management scholars. While this complexity is a challenge, better coordination can create opportunities for creativity and synergy. In addition, there has been a shift towards a more 'holistic' approach to disaster response, which views the disaster cycle as integrated. After all, disaster response remains an 'end-of-pipe' approach. To avoid reinventing the wheel every time a disaster strikes, it makes more sense to invest in disaster preparedness, which seems to hold the best promise for mitigating impacts. Moreover, observers recognise that all disasters cannot possibly be prevented. Disasters will continue to strike, with depressing regularity.

An emphasis on preparedness and stakeholder inclusion constitutes a new paradigm in a changing field. Three partially overlapping disaster response 'waves'<sup>4</sup> in the second half of the twentieth century resulted in an extreme focus on the natural and social dimensions of disasters (Table 1, based on Green and Warner, 1999). Structural, straightforward 'keeping-the-river-out' approaches (the first flood management 'wave'), such as the use of high floodwalls and dikes, eliminate high incidence, low consequence risks, but also eradicate awareness of the possibility of calamity. Thus, the destructive impact of low incidence, high consequence disasters like major floods will be much greater than would be the case in areas where people are conscious of the risk. Behavioural, 'keeping-the-people-out' approaches (the second wave<sup>5</sup>), such as the employment of zoning regulations, highlighted the fact that actors have a range of choices in coping with disaster, and developed incentives to try and induce people to make sensible settlement decisions (see White, 1974). This approach, however, underestimated the structural reasons why people live in flood plains in spite of obvious vulnerability to flood hazard (Blaikie et al., 1994). Due to a lack of funds and the right social and political connections, many do not have a real choice to settle elsewhere (in safer places), and are disproportionately exposed to hazard.

A balance between the structural and the incidental and the social and the natural has been struck in recent years by underscoring the mutual relationship between natural and social drivers of disaster (Hilhorst, 2003). The aim is to achieve the same kind of 'holism' (fourth wave) that characterises the ideal of integrated water resource management (IWRM) at the basin level, which is currently a central policy goal of the international

water community (Mitchell, 1990; Wester and Warner, 2002). ‘Integrated’ refers to four things: the management of links in the hydrological cycle; interrelations between water and land use patterns (which inevitably means accommodating competing rural and urban claims); the involvement of social stakeholders; and coordination of institutions (Mitchell, 1990). IWRM requires the participation not only of direct resource users but also of the multiple stakeholders within the wider basin area, who are affected by normal water utilisation and extreme hydrological events.

A holistic approach involves a degree of complexity and diversity and dynamics that, on the one hand, make analysis more difficult, yet on the other, create opportunities for creativity and synergy (Kooiman, van Vliet and Jentoft, 2000). To make sense of the complexity of interactions specific to disaster management, Hilhorst (2003) has proposed an analytical approach based on different domains of knowledge of action, taking advantage of a diverse range of knowledge and capacities in the areas of disaster and risk response governance, expertise and the local sphere. While these domains have fluid borders and individuals can be engaged in more than one of them, each has specific characteristics, and key discourses take place and narratives are negotiated within and among them.

How does one accommodate this diverse set of actors, capacities and perspectives? Perhaps because multi-stakeholder processes naturally produce the requisite amount of complexity in the management of complex systems (cf. Ashby, 1956), there is increasing interest in so-called Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) as a way of accommodating the different interests of actors and incorporating a range of ‘knowledge’ of, and alternatives to, natural resource management. Unlike winner-takes-all democracies, stakeholders are selected or admitted based on specific management interests. MSP processes are (ideally) *deliberative*; they proceed on the basis of argumentation and debate, as participants try to negotiate and put themselves in the shoes of other actors in order to generate win–win outcomes and social learning (see, for example, Røling and Woodhill, 2001).

**Table 1** Four disaster paradigms at a glance

Disaster paradigm	Period	Implications for management	Implications for participation
Technocratic paradigm	Pre-1960	Top-down control; embankments, physical protection from floods	None
Behavioural paradigm	1960s–1970s	Early warning systems, flood zoning, changes in people’s behaviour (through education)	Education and training, utilitarian perspective
Vulnerability paradigm	1980–1990s	Overall development, countering root causes of vulnerability (through revolutionary change)	Empowerment of the vulnerable, capacity-building
Complexity paradigm	Emergent	Adaptive management of society and environment, collaborative self-organisation	Polycentric stakeholder inclusion, negotiation, social learning

Source: Warner, Waalewijn and Hilhorst (2002).

In this article, we explore the role of platforms in river basin management and disaster response. To illustrate the argument in the context of climate-induced challenges to resource management, we draw on the example of Peru, where in response to extreme weather events triggered by El Niño, several MSPs came into being. In this case study, we look at two promising MSP-type responses to disaster, which after a promising start got into major difficulties: the MSP in flood-affected, coastal Ica, which fell apart; and the MSP in drought-affected Ayacucho in the Peruvian sierra, which is regenerating itself after a crisis and a lull in activity. Their problems seem quite typical of MSPs elsewhere. We draw lessons and more general conclusions from the case study.

## What is a platform?

Multi-Stakeholder Platforms are decision-making bodies (voluntary or statutory) comprising different stakeholders who perceive the same resource management problem, realise their interdependence to deal with it, and come together to agree on action strategies for solving it (Steins and Edwards, 1998). The word ‘platform’ suggests a raised surface, which pleasingly connotes the conspicuous nature of MSPs, which function in the public space and are therefore open to public scrutiny. However, related concepts like dialogues, fora, partnerships and learning alliances signify the same concept and thus can be used fairly interchangeably.

Provided the benefits attributed to it are being realised—empowerment, conflict management, learning and more integrated management (see Warner, Waalewijn and Hilhorst, 2002)—MSPs could play a significant role in risk management as a collective negotiation, coordination, dispute settlement and learning mechanism for disaster management. Helping vulnerable stakeholders to voice their interests within MSPs can improve their access to the public and private sectors and to aid and other civil society organisations. For this to happen, goals and mandates should be clearly defined and people should be willing to learn from different perceptions of a common problem. As Thompson and Warburton (1985) have famously shown, ‘contradictory certainties’ inform the understanding of different actor groups of the causes and effects of flood hazards, such as in Bangladesh in 1988. These groups tend to ignore or de-legitimise each other’s hazard narratives, producing important blind spots. Thompson and Warburton (1985) suggest that covering the whole spectrum would result in more adequate resource management.

The social learning process can initiate better understanding of geophysical conditions and social vulnerabilities. A thorough process would not only lead to fine-tuning (‘concertation’), but also to an overview of possible alternatives to management. This social learning stage can be followed by dissemination of information on risks in the basin and the development of a joint vision for risk reduction based on a balanced action programme.

One important aspect in this regard is the integration of different *disciplines* in an MSP. While in its common conceptual format, a multiplicity of stakeholders refers to economic identity groups with interests in water management, there is no reason why

other differences should, by definition, be neglected—in highly divided countries, cultural, ethnic and linguistic identities may be as relevant as economic identities in realising productive dialogues (Warner and Simpungwe, 2003).

In the context of risk management, the role of knowledge is crucial. Water management, risk management and climate studies are highly specialised fields. There is little contact between different professional cultures and people tend to stick to the own management tier or scientific world. For adaptive and integrated management, linkages and interdisciplinary communication will be needed more than ongoing specialisation. The integration of disciplines is just as important as the incorporation of the ‘grass roots’ at the international level.

A properly functioning MSP could also assume a coordinating role during and after floods or in drought periods. In such events, coordination of aid is highly necessary, not only to facilitate the process, but also to encourage decision-making on the prioritisation of relief and the adjustment of aid provision to the local coping capacity. While an ad hoc ‘disaster relief MSP’ may be very necessary, it is doubtful whether contingency management in a disaster situation can, and should, be executed under maximum democracy conditions. The MSP, however, could agree on a contingency plan with specific roles and procedures to be performed during the disaster, and it could play a role in the dissemination of appropriate and accessible information, thus enhancing hazard preparedness.

Looking ahead, after a major disaster the MSP can play a part in exploiting the ‘window of opportunity’, which often remains closed as hazard management becomes enmeshed in old patterns. If the MSP is able to develop a common vision on the river basin and is able to translate this into a working programme, the radical changes in the basin’s situation can be a chance to steer (formerly deadlocked) basin management in the desired direction and reduce risk. Mitigation at the post-disaster stage then becomes an option. The key role of an MSP would be in developing a vision and steering the adaptive management process, based on social learning and negotiation. This means the focus of the MSP should be process-oriented, rather than setting end goals and bureaucratic rules. The latter should only be relative and involve working towards adaptive and flexible management.

A major question, of course, is: who should be invited on to the platform? To reflect the highly diverse collection of stakeholders, participants should represent the public and private sectors and civil society and the local, national and where appropriate international level, and they should be especially geared towards knowledge and action orientations with respect to disaster response—in other words, they should span Hilhorst’s three domains. The government should be represented by its different spheres, as far as is relevant in the specific basin context. Municipal councils of large cities should also be incorporated into the MSP. If the basin is shared by more nations, due attention should be paid to the integration of different country perspectives. This might be realised through ‘nesting’ the MSP at different tiers. In addition, in a national river basin, the different interests between upstream and downstream users should be well represented, as not all farmers or fishermen have the same interests.

The incorporation of water management in disaster management can generate specific problems in a river basin context. First, interest groups may be different. Inhabitants of the flood plain are probably only interested in risk reduction activities and farmers on higher fields might not be so concerned with flood reduction. Disaster may have far wider origins and far more localised consequences.

In disaster-prone areas, 'regular' water management should be integrated into disaster management in order to be adaptive in daily risk management and not to have bifurcating paths of development. The manner in which the MSP nests itself within the institutional framework determines to a great extent its effectiveness (Warner and Verhallen, 2005). After all, new institutions do not arise in a tabula rasa situation. Often formal or informal structures governing water and disaster are already in place when an MSP comes into being.

Like IWRM, the MSP has not yet yielded immediately appealing success stories. Still we feel that it is instructive to see how stakeholder dialogue can release social energies in times of hazard and tension. As a learning exercise, the next section will sketch out what became of two Peruvian MSPs, one for disaster coping, and one for post-disaster conflict management.

## **Peru: emerging from trauma**

'El Niño' was the name that nineteenth-century Peruvian fishermen gave to a periodic flow of warm Pacific equatorial water that moved southward around Christmas, reducing fish catches and bringing hunger to peasant families.<sup>6</sup> Now, it is the name of the weather phenomenon originating in the Southern Oscillation, which, according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), had the greatest impact on Peru (Sarno, 1998).

Peru, on the southwest of the Latin American continent, is no stranger to climatic extremes—it is tropical in the east and characterised by dry desert in west; it can be temperate to very cold in the Andes. In 1998, though, the country experienced simultaneous unseasonable droughts and infrequent floods. 'Excessive temperatures and floods on one side of the country and drought and Antarctic cold on the other [were] the two sides of the "mega Niño". December's [1997] heavy rains caused severe flooding and landslides in the northern, central and south-eastern parts of Peru' (IPS, 1998).

El Niño precipitated socio-economic changes, not all positive, about which there is more later in the article. Apart from death, destruction and destitution, however, El Niño also had a more positive outcome for Peru. El Niño-related droughts and floods have given rise to local participatory responses coordinated among a diverse pool of actors. In 1993, President Alberto Fujimori promulgated a law establishing autonomous river basin authorities (Autoridades Autonomas de la Cuenca), with representatives of public and private bodies. In practice, though, only one basin authority was put in place (Lambayeque, in north Peru). In the rest of the country, the law was not implemented.

It is important to understand that El Niño is only one of many human and natural disasters to challenge Peru. In addition to climate change-induced disasters and earth-

quakes,<sup>7</sup> Peru has coped with another type of disaster: guerrilla violence by Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in the 1980s. This traumatised the country, held it back in terms of economic and educational capacities and invited a (some would say equally disastrous) dictatorship under Fujimori, bringing problems of its own on top of the persistent corruption and exploitation that Sendero Luminoso purported to combat. Yet, the relative end of all-encompassing violence<sup>8</sup> also created a window of opportunity for cooperative change.

The years of violence ended with the Fujimori administrations (1990–95 and 1995–2000). The cost of his strong leadership was ‘competitive authoritarianism’ (Levitsky and Way, 2002), coupling a neo-liberal economic model with an authoritarian and top-down style, which did not recognise grass roots entities and several civil society organisations or even eliminated them. This isolation from local knowledge and action became problematic in the wake of climate-induced weather extremes. In the below case descriptions we investigate the rise and fall of two self-organised Peruvian platforms for disaster response.

### The Ica platform

Normally, the coastal region of Peru is used to extreme drought comparable to that of the Sahara Desert. The city of Ica is situated right next to the Pacific desert; it never rains there, and there is no vegetation to mention. Ingenious methods of even catching the haze drops are well known here.

Like the fertile rim lands of volcanoes, river valleys are highly attractive to people—they are scenic, fertile and flat, and provide easy access for transport. Those who experience annual flooding are sufficiently reminded of the power of the flood to be prepared for it—they ‘live with the floods’. Those who live along rivers that rarely strike out, though, may develop a false sense of security.

In Ica, a coastal city of some 350,000 people south of Lima, the last great flood was that of 1963. A master plan for protecting Ica dates back to 1993, but it has never been implemented. Only small floodwalls or bunds, ‘costales de arena’, were put in place to shield the city and valley from an occasional overflow of the riverbanks. For all practical purposes, therefore, Ica was unprepared for a flood. Moreover, no local organisations were present to coordinate emergency aid and the population expected outside actors, especially the central government, to step in.

While the waters of the River Ica were rising at the beginning of 1998, an Ica representative noted during a meeting of the National Water Users’ Association (Junta Nacional de Usuarios) that while basic infrastructural maintenance and cleaning out of the irrigation canals had occurred, a ‘state of emergency due to El Niño’s effects was declared in many departments, but not [in] Ica’ (Sarno, 1998). As a result, no special preventive measures were taken, and nothing prepared the city for the heavy rain that fell on Ica on the night of 19 January, one of only two nights of such rain (Hocquenghem, Mesclier and Oré, 2001).

On 23 January, the riverbanks started to overflow—quite similar to the course of events in 1963, as Hocquenghem, Mesclier and Oré (2001) point out. Citizens called

on Lima and on the National Institute for Civil Defence (Instituto Nacional de Defensa Civil, INDECI) to supply heavy machinery to reinforce river defences and to clean out the channel. Nevertheless, unlike other provinces declaring emergency zones, no support was forthcoming from the capital for Ayacucho.

The volume of water coming down the river was approximately 660 cubic metres, while the river channel capacity was only 250 cubic metres, and on 29 January, heavy rains started to fall again. In the end, the floods in the city, said to be the worst in Peru in 50 years (CNN, 1998), left 70 people dead and 22,000 homeless. Some 150,000 people were affected in total—20,000 houses were damaged and 4,300 were destroyed. The river's most important offtake, the 50-kilometre earth canal of Achirana, and the city's water supply were incapacitated and the irrigation system destroyed (Hocquenghem, Mesclier and Oré, 2001). Moreover, the River Ica flows along the cordillera ridges, exposing the valley to huacos (mudslides mixed with stones), worsening the impact.

In the absence of formal mechanisms, the sudden crisis gave rise to local self-organisation. In a way, this should not come as a surprise—as Kirschenbaum (2003) has shown, a 'chaotic' local response to disaster remains the primary coping mechanism, despite the best efforts of disaster management agencies and institutions to respond to the need to act. In the face of disaster, the days after the flooding saw spontaneous forms of organisation. Neighbours and members of mothers' clubs (who engaged in emergency food distribution) took the lead in setting up the Civil Front of Ica (Frente Civica de Ica), comprising neighbourhood organisations, agriculturalists, irrigator bodies, professionals, local authorities and dignitaries—an organisation with a strong anti-centralist, anti-government slant. Its principal objectives were to reform the development process in Ica, as well as to improve water management in the urban and rural area.

We noted above the need for a way to manage a diverse collection of stakeholder concerns and knowledge. In the context of Ica, the multi-party constitution of this spontaneous platform is interesting. A range of highly dissimilar interests were represented: the public sector (local government); civil society (voluntary organisations); and the private sector (agriculture). This made coordination and 'concertation' (fine-tuning) possible. The fact that urban and rural interests were represented, encapsulating both sides in a potential conflict for resources, was a definite plus. Both urbanites and country dwellers share the same water basin and make claims to it. Finally, the platform involved various kinds of expert and non-expert knowledge and capabilities, to facilitate the easy exchange of up-to-date information.

However, the platform could never create a productive link with the central government, and may even have fed on anti-Fujimori sentiment. In turn, as it became aware of the local platform, the Fujimori administration immediately perceived the Civil Front as a source of undesirable competition rather than as one of support. Sensing an anti-centralist dimension to local activism in Ica, it branded members of the Civil Front as 'agitators and politicians'. Indeed, the Ica Civil Front succumbed to government pressure after only two years and disintegrated.

A certain anti-centralist slant is undeniable. The policies pursued by Fujimori, favouring the privatisation of public services and natural resources and markets, had already



increased economic disparities in the region. The El Niño events can be said to have given rise to further socio-economic change in the Ica valley. Ica is in a process of urbanisation: the city is being expanded into the desert, with new urban developments being built on highly productive agricultural land, playing havoc with drainage and sewage systems. The arrival of transnational companies in the late 1990s, notably Chilean agro-export firms, caused the erstwhile cotton exporting area to diversify into asparagus and tomato production. Depopulation and poverty are rife in the countryside. Economic recession and low crop prices precipitated the migration of the youth to the city and the capital, Lima, leaving the elderly to cultivate the plots. Thus, the vulnerability to disaster of especially the minifundistas (very small farmers) was tremendous (Hocquenghem, Mesclier and Oré, 2001), having no savings and finding themselves deeply in debt. These small farmers had no liquidity with which to recover from flood damage.

After El Niño, Fujimori tried to respond to the emergency solely through the president's office (Ministerio Presidencial), initially unaware of any kind of local organisation that could help. The INDECI did take preventive steps to deal with the worst of the flooding before it occurred, organising engineering works at the riverbanks, and a capacity-building programme to help communities prepare for the worst.

While Fujimori boasted that technical measures (flood barriers) had mitigated the damage, the population felt that the brunt of the disaster response fell squarely on the shoulders of local people. In addition, the people of Ica were compelled to reject the temporary housing for citizens affected by El Niño and built by the Fujimori government—a project called Tierra Prometida (Promised Land). The houses were built in desert areas, and are very fragile, due to the use of inappropriate materials. The programme responsible for the construction of the houses did not consult with the people first; designs and models came straight from the central government.

## The Ayacucho platform

### *Post-disaster conflict resolution*

While Ica was confronting its flood predicament, Ayacucho experienced a period of severe drought, also attributed to the El Niño effect. Unlike with Ica, though, there was a degree of preparedness on the part of the central government and the region was declared an emergency zone. Nonetheless, the drought led to intense competition for water between the city and the countryside, which brought on a different type of crisis.

When major drought hit Ayacucho in January 1998, the region was recovering from the trauma of violence, after being a principal fighting arena in the 1980s. Nationwide, more than 60,000 people died in the conflict between armed rebels and state forces, 40% of that number in Ayacucho (Oré, 2004, p. 128). Between 600,000 and one million people fled violence in the Peruvian regions of Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Apurímac, the country's poorest constituencies, seeking relative safety in the cities.

Thus, due to political violence, the city of Huamanga, the capital of Ayacucho, had grown considerably by the time El Niño struck. This growth, which occurred in a non-orderly fashion, mainly through the establishment of shantytowns and urban settlements, also produced the completely novel situation of competition for water.

Because of greater urban demand for water, the Huamanga Water and Sanitation Company (Asociación de Empresas Prestadoras de Servicios de Saneamiento, EPSASA), which had acquired some of the water needed by the city from Chiara (a peasant community) since the 1950s, captured practically all water sources, generating a major conflict. The 'Yakunchik' platform sought to tackle this hydraulic stress-induced conflict.

The subsequent rise in poverty resulted in the increased involvement of the state in Ayacucho, as well as more frequent participation on the part of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and greater international cooperation. One of the things they focused on was the construction of small hydraulic works: dams, reservoirs, intakes and channels. One such scheme was the proyecto especial Río Cachi (the special project on the River Cachi). However, these works were carried out without a preliminary study of their possible impacts, planning or follow up.

With the end of violence in most of Peru in 1992, and particularly in Ayacucho in 1995, many internally displaced persons who had been forced out returned with fresh expectations. The local communities tried to create a market-oriented agricultural sector, requiring greater use of irrigation techniques. Although the Cachi project was about to be completed, no determination had been made of the type of agricultural development project to be implemented in the new irrigated areas, or who the beneficiaries would be.

The nucleus of the MSP emerged at the end of 1998 following a workshop on water management problems sponsored by the Water Promotion and Management Institute (Instituto de Promoción y Gestión del Agua, IPROGA). Some of the local organisations that participated in this workshop continued to meet during 1999, offering an initial diagnosis of the irrigation problems in Ayacucho. While their original aim was irrigation water management, they began to talk about a form of water management with both an agricultural and urban orientation.

The workshop brought together, for the first time, representatives of regional and local public companies and institutions (CTAR Ayacucho, the Cachi River Special Project, the provincial and district municipalities, the water company (EPSASA) and the hydroelectric company), as well as representatives of a wide range of local and national NGOs, the university (San Cristobal de Huamanga, Ayacucho), international technical cooperation agencies and others. All became members of the newly created platform, jointly led by the Committee for the Regional Development of Ayacucho (Comité Interinstitucional de Desarrollo Rural de Ayacucho, CIDRA, an association of environmental NGOs)—and the Regional Administrative Council of Ayacucho (Consejo Transitorio Regional, CTAR, a public organisation in charge of rural public investment in the region).

The MSP was originally seen as a space where conflicting groups could voluntarily meet to resolve their differences. It was viewed as a place where they could reach agreement, debate, receive training and acquire expertise, but not as an executive body. According to Carlos Pereyra of SNV (a Dutch NGO), 'Our value added is the space . . . We are not going to manage great resources or implement great projects'.<sup>9</sup>

This initiative led to the resolution of at least two important water conflicts, and motivated other organisations, such as EPSASA, to enrol as members of the MSP.

Yakunchik also elaborated a local IWRM agenda, a subject that had not been dealt with before, especially its environmental aspect.

### *A victim of its own success?*

The Yakunchik platform took off between 2000 and 2001, consolidating its legitimacy at the local and regional level. Although it lacked resources, including an institutional facility, and logistics support to conduct its activities, and faced deficiencies at the professional level, these were, to a certain extent, compensated for by a spirit of commitment: in many instances, members were not only involved in an institutional capacity but also in a personal one. While the MSP operated on an irregular basis and carried out a few specific actions, its limited resources did not have significant ramifications. Yet, a shortage of funds prevented it from consolidating itself as an institution in a basic way and made it highly dependent on those organisations that were able to provide monetary and human resources.

In 2002, rainfall was abundant. At the same time, the Cachi project began to supply drinking water to the cities of Huamanga and Huanta, relieving the former of its water conflict. Thus, the explosive urban situation that had triggered the formation of the platform disappeared.

In addition, many professionals who had previously worked for NGOs began to work for the state and, therefore, some representatives left the MSP. Simultaneously, funding for NGOs was considerably reduced, forcing several of them to scale back their operations or even to close. Although many former NGO representatives remained involved, they now participated only in a personal capacity. Moreover, other institutions, such as the university or the provincial municipality, experienced serious institutional and budgetary problems, and consequently reduced their participation in Yakunchik. Because of the above, platform activities drastically decreased.

At that moment, an important actor appeared on stage. The peasants, mostly community members, had their own local organisation, which was community controlled but lacked official recognition from the Irrigation Technical Administration (Administración Técnica de Riego, ATDR) and the Ministry of Agriculture. This prevented them from being considered potential beneficiaries of the new Cachi project and limited their possibilities for successfully settling their differences with EPSASA.

The Cachi project did not contemplate implementation of an agrarian development project nor had the beneficiaries been determined. The uncertainty compelled irrigators to seek official recognition of their organisation from the ATDR and a guarantee from the Ministry of Agriculture that their water rights would be respected under the new conditions brought into being by the project. This recognition, which officially came into effect in December 2001, marked the culmination of an organisation process that had taken several years and that led to the establishment of the Ayacucho Union of Irrigation Users (Junta de Usuarios de Riego de Ayacucho, JUDRA). The organisation claims to have 17,000 members (2003 figure).

As well as establishing their own national and regional agenda,<sup>10</sup> JUDRA leaders have been quite critical of the Yakunchik platform, pointing out that its membership,

which mainly consists of public and private institutions, excludes associations of water users. They also believe that the platform has been inefficient and that it has not supported the activities of JUDRA despite earlier pledges to do so. Moreover, they claim that the platform's activities run in parallel with those of JUDRA, as both organisations are active in similar areas. Although JUDRA had never been officially integrated into the platform, its president made participation conditional on the platform's future performance—JUDRA's involvement in Yakunchik has been intense since 2002, and its demands led to constant reorientation of the MSP agenda.

The issue of whether JUDRA should become a member of Yakunchik generated an internal conflict within the MSP. While several NGOs and international cooperation agencies were in favour, state agencies voiced their opposition. An emergency meeting was held to decide whether the platform should continue to carry out its activities. Several critical issues regarding the performance of the MSP were discussed: non-accomplishment of the activity plan; the lack of continuity of representations from participating institutions; a shortage of resources; a lack of commitment on the part of some institutions; and non-participation of water users. All of these issues highlighted problems concerning the sustainability of Yakunchik and its function or mission in the new context.

In terms of the role of the MSP, one group of members wanted to carry out a series of water management activities in order to gain legitimacy in the region, but this would not differentiate the platform from other local NGOs. During a crucial meeting, mechanisms were established to provide the platform with more financial autonomy. A monthly financial contribution was agreed to allow the MSP to keep going; henceforth it would use the institutional facilities of one of its members as its headquarters.

### Slow to grow, quick to die?

The platform approach is not novel to the Peruvian environment. In a way, MSPs are an incarnation of an older Peruvian tradition of *mesas de concertación* (negotiation roundtables), popular in the 1980s. Post-dictatorship governments, notably the caretaker administration of President Valentin Paniagua (2000–01), have proved rather more platform-friendly than Fujimori's regime. The government of President Alejandro Toledo (2001–present) introduced successive changes by appointing new officials as heads of the public organisations, companies and projects. While committed to the idea of liberalising the economy, Toledo seeks to promote participatory water management as well and has sought institutional change to enable the establishment of catchment management organisations (platforms) for Peru's 200-plus watersheds (*cuencas*). In recent times, watershed-level roundtables have indeed been instituted in Ica and elsewhere. These platforms, however, focus on combating poverty—while Peru is classed as a middle-income country, a high percentage of the population remains poor to very poor—and promoting human rights. Water and disaster preparedness are not high on the agenda.

In itself, this is no reason for worry. A focus on poverty makes perfect sense from a hazards standpoint. The literature on disaster studies suggests that reducing poverty can diminish vulnerability to the impact of disaster (see, for instance, Heijmans and Victoria, 2001). In addition, in our research project, 'Multi-Stakeholder Platforms for

Integrated Catchment Management’, we found that ‘water management’ fora tend to discuss far broader themes than water alone. Land care, socio-economic development, health, housing and traffic infrastructure may be on the agenda, simply because they directly affect the lives and livelihoods of interested people.

However, the state-driven poverty roundtables have often failed to include the key stakeholders—the poor—themselves. The participants are local leaders and professionals and representatives of local authorities, not peasants or people from popular organisations. While disaster preparedness is a significant omission on the agenda, it is the poor who are most *vulnerable* to disaster.

There continues to be a role for post-Niño platforms. Efforts are being made to revive the Ica platform, without significant success so far, and several other platforms, such as an inter-municipal platform in the catchment of the River Lurin, have sprung into life. In the past few years, the Peruvian umbrella organisation, IPROGA, and the Dutch support organisation, SNV Perú, have organised annual inter-platform meetings, condoned by the Global Water Partnership.<sup>11</sup>

Among other outputs, these gatherings have led to proposed new water legislation in which platforms will be given a formal institutional role in water management. This would indeed be recommended practice in the view of Röling and Jiggins, who advocate the ‘nesting’ of platforms (Steins, Röling and Edwards, 2000). As of December 2005, however, this process is still very slow in coming.

## Conclusion

A crisis mercilessly reveals the conflicts within, and the weaknesses of, a social patchwork. El Niño, in itself the complex conjunction of multiple processes, had differential impacts on Peru. Although often presented as a unique phenomenon, affecting all equally, El Niño hit the poor and the elderly hardest. Violence-induced, unplanned urbanisation led to a swelling of the city of Ica, pushing people into the floodplain and mudslide-prone areas. Moreover, the flood showed up grave infrastructural neglect—in the valley of Ica, it exposed the dismal state of disrepair of the Achirana irrigation channel and the weakness of river defences.

In 1998, the Peruvian government was to some degree prepared for drought in central and southern Peru, but not for flooding in the coastal region. Furthermore, it seems to have concentrated on highly visible technical solutions in densely populated urban areas, not the sparsely populated countryside. It has rarely communicated with local governments and civil society organisations, let alone listened to their suggestions for low-cost flood protection works. Some works were of necessity realised without much help from central government. It is also true, however, that sections of the population lacked proper knowledge of the environmental risks and the means of coping with them, while the government had difficulty getting people to leave endangered mansions in high-risk zones.

Thus, communication, information exchange and coordination between the different ‘domains of knowledge and action’ were sadly missing. The case of Ica suggests that

a pre-existing coordinating body might well have made a significant difference in disaster response. While *within* the local setting an impressive degree of coordination took place, coordination between the three domains of knowledge and action was sorely lacking, as the MSP has no secure link with central government. In Ayacucho, the government was very much on-board but the urban–rural link was not properly consolidated within the local domain.

In theory, MSPs, a manifestation of the fourth ‘holistic’ wave in disaster management, seem to hold out a way of addressing several of the past failures of participation, although obviously they are no panacea (Warner, Waalewijn and Hillhorst, 2002) and practice in Peru is especially problematic. Institutional sustainability in particular is a problem for any platform, not just Peru’s ‘El Niño MSPs’. The sense of urgency easily decreases as the problem situation relaxes or disappears (temporarily), while the platform cannot easily make meaningful changes for lack of a proper mandate and resource generating capacity, which seem essential to MSP sustainability (Warner and Verhallen, 2005). Unfortunately, experiences in other MSP-oriented countries, such as South Africa, likewise show that MSPs for local resource management are not often mandated to take meaningful decisions on disaster management, since this is organised at the central level. Governments are loath to decentralise this service.

This came to show in the case of Yakunchik, which so far has not really taken full advantage of a more conducive political environment. Unlike Ica, the Ayacucho platform survived Fujimori’s staunch resistance to MSPs. While the Ica platform never enjoyed *external legitimacy*, being seen as an opposition group, the Ayacucho platform survived long enough to see a change towards a more participation-friendly government. The platform originated in response to drought-induced conflict, and managed to evolve into a water management platform. Paradoxically, though, it ran out of steam in part due to its very success, as its active members were co-opted by the new government and the most acute problems disappeared.

We saw in the case description that Ayacucho overcame a difficult spell when it ran into trouble for its perceived lack of *internal legitimacy*. A significant part of the rural constituency was not really represented. This problem seems to have been resolved for the moment, but there is still the danger of a platform acting as a ‘circle of friends’, while the link with the constituencies and a sense of urgency and necessity are absent.

The challenge remains for such platforms to develop a strategy for disaster prevention and vulnerability reduction on behalf of the weaker section of society. Disasters cause most harm to the poor, yet these people are often not taken seriously before or after the event. If they are taken into account at all, they are seen as vulnerable victims, not as knowledgeable agents who have capacities to prepare for, and cushion the effects of, major events like floods and landslides. The current anti-poverty platforms do not seem up to this task, for lack of inclusion of the directly affected (the peasantry).

Ironically, the best guarantee for regenerating both the Ica and Ayacucho platforms might be a new El Niño event, which would restore the sense of urgency. While we do not hope for such an event, a campaign to promote the cognitive mindset needed for disaster preparedness is still very necessary.

## Correspondence

Jeroen Warner, Wageningen University, Irrigation and Water Engineering Group, Nieuwe Kanaal 11, NL-6709 PA Wageningen, Netherlands. E-mail: jeroen.warner@wur.nl or jeroenwarner@gmail.com.

María Teresa Oré, Chimú 170, Lima 21, Peru. E-mail: teresaore@amauta.rcp.net.pe.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The research discussed in this article formed part of the 'Multi-Stakeholder Platforms for Integrated Catchment Platforms' project (2001–04), funded by Dutch Partners for Water. The Red Cross/Red Crescent Centre on Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness kindly sponsored a workshop on 'Multi-Stakeholder Platforms for Disaster Preparedness' on 29 June 2002, which helped to shape the ideas expressed here.
- <sup>2</sup> See <http://unfccc.int/resource/iuckit/infokit2001.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Jeroen Warner, 2005.
- <sup>4</sup> Note that the 'waves' are not mutually exclusive. They indicate, for analytical purposes, which approach was stressed at a particular time; in practice, flood policies tend to be a combination of different paradigms.
- <sup>5</sup> Gilbert F. White spearheaded this approach, along with his co-workers, I. Burton and R. W. Kates. The behaviourist approach eroded the hegemony of structural flood works and the dominance of the US Corps of Engineers in flood management in the United States.
- <sup>6</sup> El Niño, meaning the Child, refers to Christ.
- <sup>7</sup> In 1996, an earthquake was felt in Ica, Arequipa and Ayacucho, killing 15 people. Some 2,500 earthquakes have been recorded so far in Peru.
- <sup>8</sup> As of December 2005, sporadic guerrilla violence is still occurring in Ayacucho.
- <sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Teresa Oré, 2001.
- <sup>10</sup> JUDRA raised national-level issues focused on agrarian policy (such as restrictions on food imports, credit, agrarian debt, taxes, property titles and new irrigation law). However, it also made regional demands, for example calling for state-NGO coordinated planning and implementation of water management initiatives and infrastructure irrigation works, the replacement of some ATDR officials owing to their perceived incompetence and the investigation of 'ghost' or unfinished construction projects.
- <sup>11</sup> See [http://www.portaldelaguapwp.com.pe/docs/dialogo\\_2002/d2002\\_doc\\_informe\\_lima.doc](http://www.portaldelaguapwp.com.pe/docs/dialogo_2002/d2002_doc_informe_lima.doc).

## References

- Ashby, W.R. (1956) *An Introduction to Cybernetics. Part Two: Variety*. Methuen, London.
- Blaikie, P., T. Cannon, I. Davis and B. Wisner (1994) *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters*. Routledge, London.
- Chan, N.W. and D.J. Parker (1996) 'Response to dynamic flood hazard factors in Peninsular Malaysia'. *The Geographical Journal*. Vol. 162, No. 3. p. 313.
- Christie, F. and J. Hanlon (2001) *Mozambique and the Great Flood of 2000*. James Currey, Oxford.
- CNN (Cable News Network) (1998) 'Devastating floods in Peru blamed on El Niño'. <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/28/peru.el.Niño/>.
- Green, C. and J. Warner (1999) 'Flood Management: Towards a New Paradigm'. Conference paper presented at the Stockholm Water Symposium, 9–12 August 1999, Stockholm.
- Heijmans, A. and L.P. Victoria (2001) *Citizenry-based & development-oriented disaster response: experiences and practices in disaster management of the citizens' disaster response network in the Philippines*. Center for Disaster Preparedness, Quezon City.

- Hilhorst, D. (2003) 'Responding to disasters: diversity of bureaucrats, technocrats and local people'. *Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*. 21(3). pp. 37–55.
- Hocquenghem, A., E. Mesclier and M.T. Oré (2001) 'Los múltiples avatares de El Niño'. In J. Tarazona, W. Arntz and E. Castillo de Maruenda (eds.) *El Niño en América Latina. Impactos Biológicos y Sociales*. Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (National Council for Science and Technology), Lima, pp. 323–330.
- IPS (Inter Press Service) (1998), 'Development: Peru's Poor Displaced by War Return to Ayacucho To Face El Niño'. 12 January. <http://www.ips.org/Critical/Aid/per1201.html>.
- Kirschenbaum, A. (2003) *Chaos, Disaster and Organisation*. Marcel Dekker, New York, NY and Basel.
- Kooiman, J., L.M. van Vliet and S. Jentoft (2000) *Creative Governance*. Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Levitsky, S. and L.A. Way (2002) 'Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism'. *Journal of Democracy*. 13(2). pp. 51–65. <http://www.cla.wayne.edu/polisci/kdk/Comparative/SOURCES/levitskyandway.html>.
- Mitchell, B. (ed.) (1990) *Integrated water management, international experiences and perspectives*. Belhaven Press, London.
- Oré, M.T. (1998) 'Y cuando se salió el río nos obligó a pensar'. *Quehacer*. 112. pp. 46–51.
- Oré, M.T. (2004) 'Yakunchik, un mecanismo de concertación después de la violencia'. In J. Warner and A. Moreyra. *Conflictos y Participación*. Nordan, Montevideo. pp. 127–144.
- Oré, M.T. (2005) *AGUA, Bien Común y Usos Privados. Riego Estado y Conflictos en La Achirana del Inca*. Catholic University of Peru, Lima, Water Law and Indigenous Rights Programme, Wageningen University, Wageningen, and the Intermediate Technology and Development Group (ITDG), Lima.
- Röling, N. and J. Woodhill (2001) 'From paradigms to practice: foundations, principles and elements for dialogue on water, food and environment'. Background paper prepared for the 'Dialogue on Water for Food and the Environment: Workshop on design for national and basin level dialogues', 1–2 December 2001, Bonn.
- Sarno, N. (1998) 'Development: Peru's Poor Displaced By War Return To Face El Niño'. <http://www.ips.org/Critical/Aid/per1201.html>.
- Steins, N. and V.M. Edwards (1998) 'Platforms for Collective Action in Multiple-Use CPRs'. Paper presented at 'Crossing Boundaries', the seventh annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property, 10–14 June 1998, Vancouver, British Columbia.
- Steins, N., N. Röling and V. Edwards (2000) 'Re—"designing" the principles: An interactive perspective to CPR theory'. Paper prepared for the eighth annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property, 1–4 June 2000, Bloomington, IN. <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00000579/00/steinsno52400.pdf>.
- Thompson M. and M. Warburton (1985) 'Decision-making under contradictory certainties: how to save the Himalayas when you can't find out what's wrong with them'. *Journal of Applied Systems Analysis*. 12. pp. 3–34.
- Warner, J., P. Waalewijn and D. Hilhorst (2002) 'Public Participation for Disaster-Prone Watersheds: Time for Multi-Stakeholder Platforms?' Water and Climate Dialogue Thematic Paper. *Disaster Sites*. No. 6. Wageningen University, Wageningen.
- Warner, J.F. and E. Simpungwe (2003) 'Stakeholder participation in South Africa: Power to the people?' Paper presented at the second International Symposium on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), 'Towards sustainable water utilization in the 21st century', 22–24 January 2003, Stellenbosch.
- Warner, J. and A. Verhallen (2005) 'Multi-stakeholder Platforms for Integrated Catchment Management: Towards a comparative typology'. In T. Gössling, R.J.G. Jansen and L.A.G. Oerlemans (eds.) *Coalitions and Collisions*. Wolf Legal Publishers, Nijmegen. pp. 213–225.
- Wester, P. and J. Warner (2002) 'River basin management reconsidered'. In A. Turton and R. Henwood (eds.) *Hydropolitics in a Developing World: A South African Perspective*. Centre for International Political Studies (CIPS), University of Pretoria, Pretoria. pp. 61–71.
- White, G.F. (ed.), (1974), *Natural Hazards: Local, National, Global*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.