

Proposed Regional Approach to Rural Drinking Water Management

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Drinking water management is a critical issue with unique challenges for rural communities. How drinking water is managed has important links to the economy, the environment, and society. However these links, as well as unique challenges faced in rural areas, are often poorly addressed by traditional management approaches.

We are proposing a regional approach to drinking water management designed to address identified issues and overcome challenges in rural areas. Before developing a detailed guide **we would like your feedback on the proposed key concepts and regional characteristics described below.**

Key concepts:

- **Self-identifying the working region**
- **Coordinated efforts using existing resources**
- **Flexibility to collaborate while remaining independent**
- **Making connections and reducing duplication**
- **Incorporating local context**
- **Combining best practices from different fields of study**
- **Integrating the human and environmental aspects of water**

Why a regional approach?

- A flexible regional approach offers an opportunity to combine strengths to overcome challenges, while maintaining community independence.
- Water is not bound by jurisdictional lines. A regional approach allows for effective, collaborative action at the watershed level.

How is this approach different?

Water is often considered from an engineering, environmental, or health perspective, but the link between development and water is often unrecognized. Existing and past approaches to drinking water have achieved different degrees of success and each provides valuable lessons. What makes the proposed approach different is the inclusion of regional development, deliberately adding the consideration of development (particularly economic development) to the more typical best practices for drinking water management.

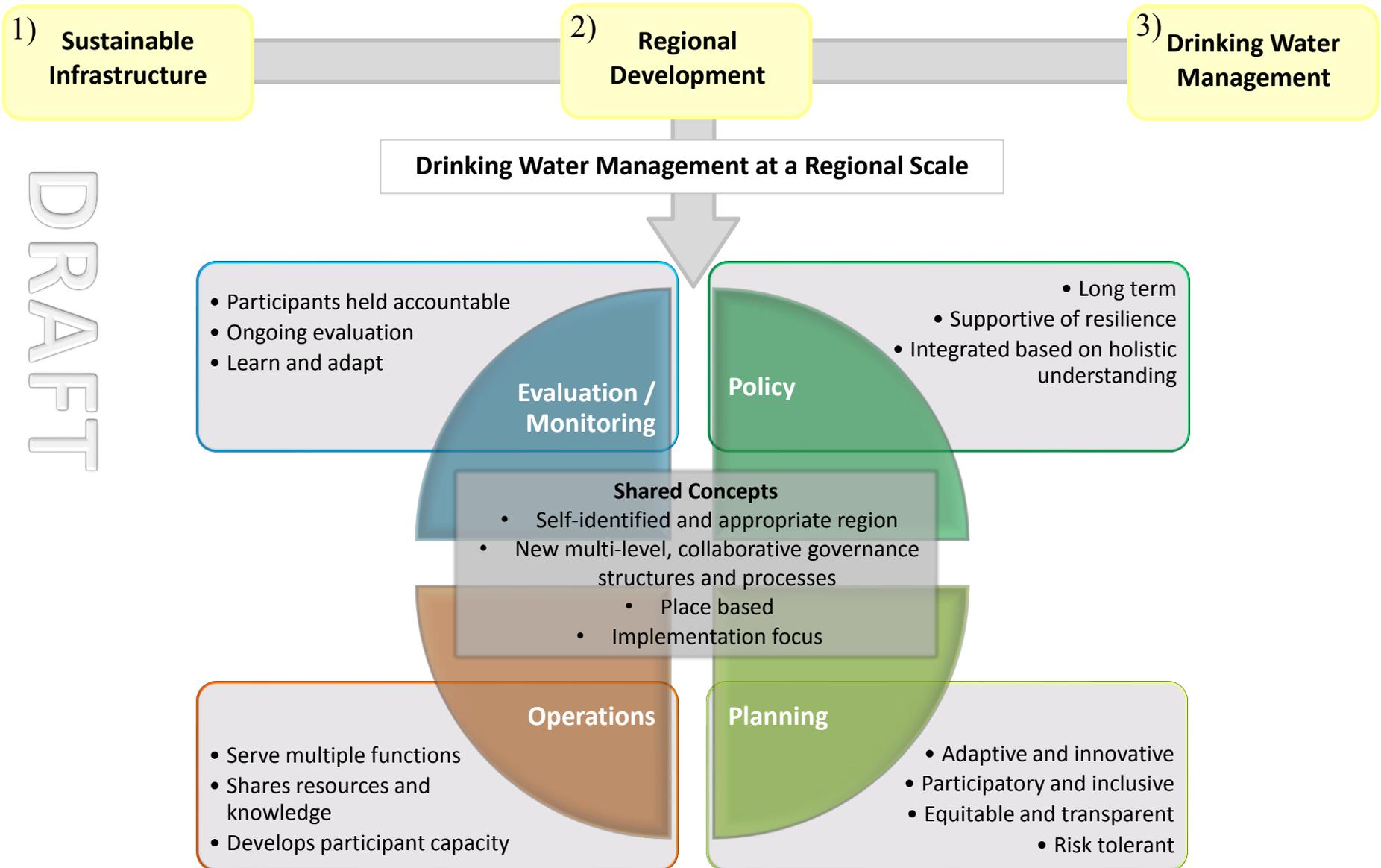
What is included?



While this approach is not intended to change outside factors like existing provincial legislation, it does have the potential to link to other subjects or important factors and provide steps the local level can take to improve and maintain their current systems.

Overview: Regional Drinking Water Approach

Strengths from 1, 2, and 3 combine to inform action surrounding policy, planning, operations, and evaluation and monitoring within a self-identified region.



Proposed Regional Characteristics

Working region - *Shift to a self-identified regional scale*

- Considers the watershed, but allows for consideration of manageable physical size, cultural values, and economic ties.
- The working region can apply to policy, planning, operations, and evaluation/monitoring but regional action is not required.

WHY?

- Nothing exists or functions in isolation.

Core regional group - *Shift to collaborative efforts*

- Start with all local governments (single service, municipal, regional) in the working region and include all applicable departments/people.
- The group identifies appropriate regional priorities, actions, scope, and timeline.

WHY?

- Potential to combine strengths and reduce duplication of efforts.

Institutional and governance structure - *Shift to enhanced flexibility*

- Core group authority and decision making power is recognized in the working region.
- Resource sharing and collaborative access to financial capital.
- Best governance practices:
 - Risk tolerant and adaptive
 - Clearly identified benefits, costs, roles, and responsibilities
 - Sustainable financing
- Implementation
 - All actions support implementation, evaluation, and monitoring
 - Success includes environmental and social factors

WHY?

- Ensures decisions and actions are made at the right scale and are supported.

Regional participation - *Shift toward inclusivity*

- Creation of a regional water network including the private and non-government sectors
 - Potential to include or partner with network members in policy, planning, operations, and evaluation/monitoring
- Include neighbouring regions as necessary

WHY?

- A broad network has benefits like reducing duplication, sharing knowledge or resources, enhancing strengths, building capacity, and creating understanding and support.

Place-based management - *Shift to tailor made approaches*

- Identify water related values, perceptions, history, geographies, etc.
 - Understand different uses of and reliance on water
 - Identify common ground
 - Develop mechanisms to balance considerations

WHY?

- Understanding place (unique physical, social, and economic context) is a critical consideration in policy, planning, operations, and evaluation/monitoring.

Decision making and knowledge - *Shift to integrated decision making*

- Informed decisions based on a transparent review of all available evidence/data.
- Decisions reflect integration of social, economic, and environmental considerations.
- Knowledge sharing within and outside working region.
- Public education to enhance understanding and gain buy-in.
- Support for capacity building, including opportunities:
 - To maintain/enhance professional qualifications
 - For cross-discipline learning and monitoring/evaluation of water governance

WHY?

- Create a culture of understanding and learning.

Technology and infrastructure – *Shift to innovation and creativity*

- Fostering sustainability initiatives related to water
- Moving toward sustainable infrastructure:
 - Integrate drinking water infrastructure with other infrastructure systems
 - New infrastructure and retro-fits reflect sustainable characteristics
 - Infrastructure planning is based on future needs
- Technology choice is driven by knowledge, innovation, and creativity

WHY?

- Support for forward thinking.

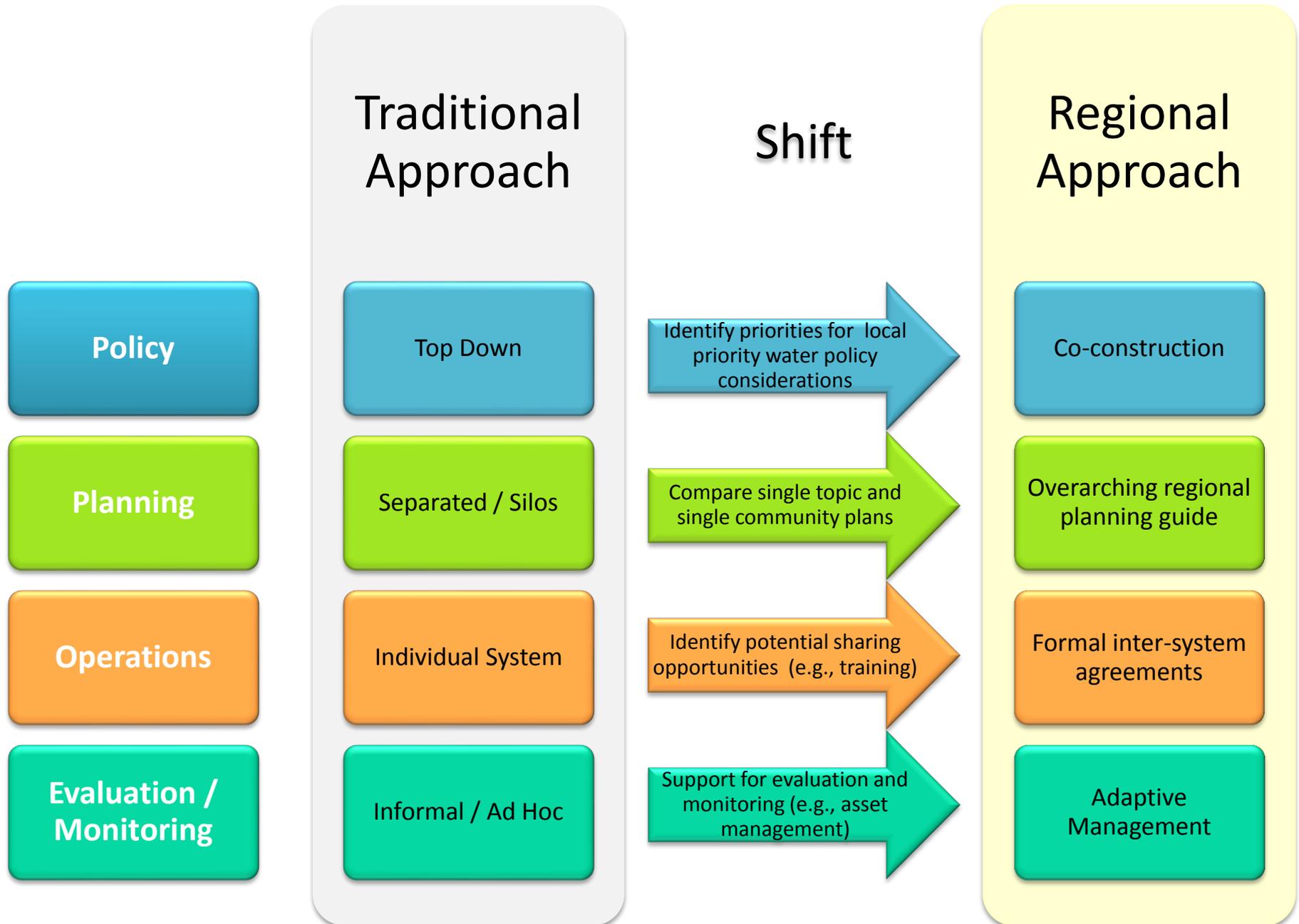
Resilience and adaptation - *Shift to adaptive management*

- Flexible structure supports the ability to learn and adapt with changing circumstances
 - Monitoring and evaluation inform changes
- Full cost accounting
- Asset management

WHY?

- Focus on long term success.

Example: moving toward a regional approach



Glossary

- **Co-construction:** combining top-down and bottom-up efforts.
- **Drinking water management:** anything related to the management of drinking water.
- **Integration:** cross over between traditionally separated areas (e.g., environment, economic development, social, planning, engineering).
- **Multi-level governance:** different levels of government (municipal, regional, provincial, federal) working together. Non-governmental stakeholders are also included.
- **Place-based:** understanding, considering, and accommodating the uniqueness of the local (community and regional) context.
- **Planning:** action required to fulfil direction from policy.
- **Policy:** provide direction for planning (e.g., vision, goals, priorities).
- **Regional approach:** regional scale management approach that reflects pre-determined characteristics based on place, governance, integration, innovation and knowledge sharing, sustainable infrastructure, and the best practices of water management.
- **Regional development:** traditionally focused on economic development, but also includes consideration of social well-being and environmental quality, at a regional scale.
- **Resilience:** ability to cope with or adapt to change.
- **Shift:** transition, the process of change occurring.
- **Traditional approach:** reflects characteristics such as single-focused planning and development, top-down policy, and a lack of inclusion.
- **Sustainable infrastructure:** design, construction, and operation of infrastructure reflect particular characteristics related to sustainability.
- **Working region:** geographic area larger than a single community. Considerations of watershed, source water, economic ties, and other relations factor into regional determination. Voluntary as opposed to predetermined political area.