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Water Policies in the Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Perspectives on Effectiveness and Political Responses in Light of the Human Dimensions Discourse from Kuwait and Bahrain

While biophysical transformations, driven by human activities and natural processes, affect the quality of human life on a worldwide scale, the consequences of progressive hydrological changes in the GCC region are profound. Research shows that they are due at least as much to the social systems that produce vulnerability as to environmental changes themselves. It has demonstrated that anthropogenic causes, such as overexploitation of water resources, are determined by population growth, economic advancement, cultural forces, values and beliefs, institutions and governance as well as the interactions among all these factors.

While the Arabian Peninsula is facing the most severe water shortages in the world, mismanagement and the continuous degradation of the regions scarce resources is significant. Several GCC member states are already using large quantities of non-renewable fossil groundwater. To meet rising demands, water authorities had sought to enhance water supply and focused mainly on the development and supply augmentation aspects. However this approach has demonstrated its inability to deliver a substantial degree of water sustainability or security. The situation was further aggravated by institutional weaknesses: Multiplication and overlap of agencies, absence of participatory decision-making processes, lack of collaboration, inadequate institutional capacity building and enabled society. While many independent organizations that produce social research are still regarded as antagonists to the government rather than useful collaborators and in this respect often limit their ability to produce critical information, government decision-making tends to operate in isolation from socio-political research results. The general objective of this paper is to reposition the water policy debate in the GCC within the context of human security. It will outline the implications of socioeconomic uncertainties in regard to water in Kuwait and Bahrain and determine on how it interacts with the complex and rapidly changing socio-political environment that ultimately determines the security of individuals and nations.