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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Enhancing Local Water Governanec in MENA region and its Epistemological and Ontological Challenges

Panel Convenors: Dr. Phil. Shirin Naef; Mr. Seyedahmad Hosseini;

LINGUE/LANGUAGES: ENGLISH

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

This panel aims at providing a discussion of epistemological and ontological challenges regarding Iran's water issue in MENA region. The MENA region as an important centre of diverse economic and cultural conditions is the most water-stressed region in the world. While almost 6.3 percent of the world's population is living in this area, the region contains only 1.4 percent of the world's renewable freshwater (World Bank 2018). Climate change and climate variability have also put the countries in the region - where scarce natural resources are already under considerable pressure - at significant risk (IPCC 2007). Furthermore, agricultural sector, with its long history in the region plays a critical role in the area's economy, livelihood and employment, and consumes more than 80 percent of their water resources. Consequently, the states of this area, including Iran, have some of the highest water usage rates in per capita compared to other countries across the world (Joffé 2016).

With the introduction of 'modernity' to the MENA region, many countries in the region have formulated some political and legal initiatives at the national level (Gleick 1998, Fekri 2011). For instance, Iran has created the most remarkable political initiatives regarding water resources by formulating land and water tenure policies, developing the agriculture sector based on modern technologies, restricting private rights in favor of the development of public rights, and nationalizing water resources (Nabavi 2017).

In return, these political initiatives have contributed to achieving some short-term social and economic goals, including increasing a sense of economic well-being for people living in the MENA region; however, lack of consistency between them and cultural and geographical features in the long run has led to establishing inappropriate and ineffective norms, behaviors, institutions, and organizations regarding water and land management (Emadi 2012, Petković 2007, Foltz 2002). In addition, this matter has eventually contributed to the ruination of numerous traditional but promising water-related institutions and structures (Fekri 2011). In this regard, one of the most important and irreparable damages regarding water-related social structures was the neglect of local communities' participation and thereby destruction of local water governance (Farhadi 2017 and 2002). Local water governance as a social structure was historically founded and played a significant role in the MENA region based on a complex interaction between the rural and urban areas, which guaranteed sustainability of water resources for successive centuries (Khaneiki 2019). But, the neglect of this cultural potential in the trajectory of formulating political initiatives led to disastrous consequences across the MENA region in the long run. The severe depletion of numerous aquifers, drying up rivers, natural lakes, landslides, and the substantial migration from rural to urban regions are some adverse repercussions of this irreversible damage (Madani 2014, Michel 2017, Fekri 2011).

Currently, MENA's societies are confronted with numerous natural and human complex issues which tackling them should follow based on the participation of local communities through enhancing local governance (OECD, 2021). Meanwhile, researchers are conducting cultural studies in regards to developing the participation-related policies. These studies based on sustainable development principles emphasize that the promising approach to enhancing local water governance is to compromise between traditional and modern values (Mato 2011, Hein C. et al. 2020). But, to deal with this matter comes up a fundamental question as follow: How can we compromise between modern and traditional values to establish a sustainable collective action in order to enhance local water governance, whereas there is inherently a distinction between those in terms of ontology and epistemology? To answer this question with a focus on Iran's experiences, the proposed panel should deal with different aspects such as modern values and desires, connections and challenges, traditional values, sustainable collective action, diversity of legal traditions, conflicts, ethical development, local water governance, climate changes, epistemological challenges of the integration of traditional knowledge, women and adaptation to dehydration, use of unconventional waters, models for increasing public participation in adapting to water scarcity, governance challenges, water rights and social justice.

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PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

- **Dr. Shirin Naef;** She received her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Zürich, and completed her postgraduate training in Bioethics at the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW) at the University of Tübingen. She was fellow at the School of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester and the Brocher Foundation in Geneva. She studied Social Anthropology, Islamic Studies and General Linguistics at the University of Bern, Switzerland. From 2018 to 2019 she was fellow at the Käte Hamburger Center for Advanced Study “Law as Culture” at the University of Bonn, where she started to work on her research project on the culture and politics of charity in Iran from the viewpoint of legal and social history. Her recent research activities also include water management and its legal context in Iran.
- **Seyedahmad Hosseini (MSc);** He graduated from the University of Tehran (2010) in the water resources field, Seyedahmad does research over 15 years in multidisciplinary subjects in regard to the water management field, inter alia, water ethics, water history, water governance, etc. Currently, He is Co-founder and CEO of Iran Water Policy School, a center for providing water policy knowledge in terms of politics, culture, economics, history, philosophy, and law subjects. In addition, He has been awarded a scholarship from the Middle East North Africa (MENA/MSP) program, funded by the Netherlands’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a short course entitled: Water & Environmental Law which is offered by IHE-Delft Institute for Water Education in the Netherlands.

INDIRIZZO/I EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES:

Dr. Shirin Naef; shirin.naef@uzh.ch

Mr. Seyedahmad Hosseini; seyed.a.hosseini@gmail.com

Panel will be held openly for additional paper submissions.