Governing Pakistan’s Water Economy in the 21st Century

Research shows that the amount of water available in Pakistan has not changed since the early 20th Century, when water flows first began to be measured. However, what has changed is the number of people who depend on water resources and how this water is used. Approximately 90% of the available water supplies are utilised for agriculture. This essentially means that any variability vis-à-vis water supply, thus, negatively impacts end usage primarily due to inefficiencies inherent in the system. While water charges have been discussed within policy circles, their implementation is lacking. Hence, farmers continue to use flood irrigation, a highly inefficient method for an increasingly water-stressed country.

Following the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), Pakistan developed what came to be known as the Indus Basin Replacement Works (1960-80), and included the two main reservoirs of Tarbela and Mangla. According to some experts, not having additional storage combined with inefficient use of water in the agriculture sector, means more stress on water resources. It is argued that investing in large reservoirs can help regulate supplies, especially as water variability increases due to the effects of climate change. Yet, there are others who question whether equitable water provisioning will be possible even with additional storage. The National Water Policy, 2018 comprehensively explores these issues and may be key in resolving some of Pakistan’s water woes. In this regard, the panel will discuss the following questions:

1. How can the water economy of Pakistan inform national level policy and decision-making, especially after promulgation of the National Water Policy, 2018?
2. What financial mechanisms can be utilised to develop national capacity to construct large development projects?
3. Social and environmental concerns are important in the implementation of large infrastructure projects. What lessons can Pakistan draw from past experience to ensure equitable planning?

Panel Organisers
Dr Imran Saqib Khalid, Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: iskhalid@sdpi.org

Mr Kashif Majeed Salik, Associate Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: kashif@sdpi.org