

Water Justice in Muslim Societies: A Scoping Workshop

21-22 May 2026

Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Marston Road, Oxford OX3 0EE

Institutional Partners:

Oxford Water Network
Oxford Systems Thinking Hub
Oxford Climate and Development Group
Oxford Department of International Development
&
Centre for Water Informatics & Technology,
Lahore University of Management Science (LUMS)



Introduction

This workshop forms a key milestone in an ongoing research effort funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF), which seeks to develop a comparative and multidisciplinary scoping study of water justice across three major river basins of the Muslim world: the Indus, the Nile, and the Euphrates–Tigris (Mesopotamian) basins. The workshop is conceived as a collaborative and exploratory forum, and there is no strict requirement for completed papers, though such contributions are warmly welcomed.

Its core objectives are to take stock of existing knowledge on the three river basins; to identify critical themes and research questions for future comparative work; to highlight cross-cutting, multidisciplinary threads linking political economy, history, technology, and ethics; to map available data resources, both historical and contemporary, that could support systematic analysis of variation within and across basins; and to help shape the intellectual agenda and partnerships for a larger, long-term research programme.

The programme will feature thematic sessions on the political economy of water and inequality; the historical evolution of river basins from the early Islamic periods to the modern era; and the role of technology and infrastructure, past and emerging, in mediating human–water relations. The Workshop warmly welcomes scholars from across disciplines—including economics, history, anthropology, political science, geography, hydrology, engineering, theology, systems analysis and data science—as well as those working on comparative cases beyond the Muslim world where relevant.

Organizers:

Professor Adeel Malik, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies*

Dr. Abubakr Muhammad, *Lahore University of Management Sciences*

Dr. Mohammed Allehbi, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies*

Sponsors:

Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF)

Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

OCIS Seminar - Wednesday 20 May 2026

5:00pm

Pre-Workshop Event

Water Justice in Muslim Societies: Towards a Macro-Historical Geographic Perspective

Professor James L. Wescoat Jr., *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Day 1—Thursday 21 May 2026

8.45 – 9.00am

Registration

9.00 – 9.05am

Welcome Remarks:

Prof Adeel Malik & Prof Abubakr Muhammad

9.05 -10.30am

Session 1: History

Chair: Dr Mohammed Allehbi, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies*

This session explores the history of governance and water justice in the Mesopotamia and Indus River from late antiquity to the modern day. It spans various periods, namely the Abbasid, Buyid, Mughal, and Ottoman eras, as well as contemporary times. Historians in this session will engage in discussions from comparative and historical analytical lens, such as but not limited to governance as source of sustainability or disruption, centralized or decentralized water management systems, availability of details found in documentary and archaeological evidence, continuities and changes in water management, and the influence of religious, social, and political norms, and ideas on water conservation and justice. The session will explore the historical roles of rulers, bureaucrats, workers, and everyday people in maintaining the delicate agrarian balance between commercial and political demands for water and its supply. By tracing these premodern legacies of governance and water justice, the session aims to inform key contemporary questions.

Discussion openers:

Dr Naz Yücel, *National Museum of Qatar*

Professor James Wescoat, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Dr Moudhy Al-Rashid, *Wolfson College Oxford*

Dr Moin Ahmad Nizami, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and University of Oxford*

Dr Veronika Poier, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies*

Coffee break: 10.30 - 11am

11.00am - 12.45pm

Session 2: Political Economy

Chair: Prof Adeel Malik, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and University of Oxford*

This session explores major themes and approaches for developing a political economy agenda to study river basins in Muslim societies, and more broadly, the relationship between water, power, and development. It takes stock of existing knowledge while identifying key gaps and priorities for future research. River basins provide a powerful lens through which to understand state formation and the evolution of fiscal and bureaucratic capacity. A central focus of the discussion is to understand the long-run effects of hydrological infrastructure—such as canals and dams—constructed during the colonial and post-colonial periods on development outcomes, particularly inequality. The session will also examine systems of water governance, access to land and water, and how these shape rural political authority, public goods provision, and local development.

Discussion openers:

Prof Bob Allen, *Nuffield College and NYU Abu Dhabi*

Prof Tirthankar Roy, *London School of Economics*

Prof Mohamed Saleh, *London School of Economics*

Prof Sam Asher, *Imperial College*

Dr Ashrakat Elshehawy, *University College London*

Dr Rinchan Ali Mirza, *Kent University*

Lunch: 12.45 - 1.45pm

2.00-3.30pm

Session 3: Data and Geo-spatial methods

Chair: Dr Ashrakat Elshehawy, *University College London*

This session examines the role of data and geospatial methods in advancing the analysis and practice of water justice across the Indus, Nile, and Euphrates–Tigris river basins. It explores how Earth observation, GIS, and data-driven approaches can reveal spatial and temporal patterns of water availability, allocation, and access. Attention is given to challenges of data collection in these regions, including limited monitoring infrastructure, political sensitivities, and fragmented datasets, as well as strategies to address data scarcity through satellite observations, data integration, and low-cost sensing systems. The session will also consider how partnerships with local research institutions and communities can support co-production of data, enhance contextual relevance, and strengthen

institutional capacity. It aims to bridge technical innovation with questions of equity and justice in comparative, cross-basin analysis.

Discussion Openers

Dr Ollie Ballinger, *University College London*

Dr Samira Berzin, *Oxford University*

Dr Rinchan Ali Mirza, *Kent University*

Dr Zahra Jaffari, *University College London*

[Expert from the World Bank's Geospatial team]

Coffee break: 3.30 – 4.00pm

4.00-5.00pm

Keynote: Power and water in Arabia and Beyond

Professor Bob Allen, *Nuffield College and NYU Abu Dhabi*

7.00 – 8.30pm | Dinner for Panellists at Shiraz, Cowley Road, Oxford

Day 2—Friday 22 May 2026

9.00-10.30pm

Session 4: Systems thinking

Chair: Dr Abubakr Muhammad, *Lahore University of Management Sciences*

This session explores a systems thinking perspective to understand water justice as an emergent property of coupled human–water systems. Viewing river basins through a systems lens highlights the interconnections between hydrology, infrastructure, institutions, and societal responses. Contributions will explore how questions of justice, fairness, and equity can be embedded within integrated modelling frameworks, including issues of water distribution and allocation, burden-sharing in carbon emissions, transboundary governance, transformation of energy & agri-food systems, and the protection of marginalized communities. The session will examine the challenges of integrating quantitative tools with qualitative narratives from environmental history and political economy and developing frameworks for meaningful inter-

basin comparisons. The session aims to identify key themes, research questions, and approaches to creating more adaptive, equitable, and resilient water systems across the three river basins.

Discussion openers:

Dr Afreen Siddiqi, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Dr Amin Elshorbagy, *University of Saskatchewan, Canada*

Dr Sedighi Elham, *International Institute of Advanced Systems Analysis, Austria*

Dr. Sonia Hoque, *University of Oxford*

Coffee break: 10.30 - 11.00am

11.00am-12.00pm

Keynote: [Topic to be confirmed]

Professor Jim Hall, *Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford*

12:00pm-1:00pm

Concluding session to discuss next steps

Prof. James Wescoat, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Dr. Rageb Rageb, *UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology*

Prof. Abubakr Muhammad, *Lahore University of Management Sciences*

Closing Remarks

Prof. Shahid Jameel, *Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies*

Lunch: 1.00 – 2.00pm