

books

Books received

Water Wars – drought, flood, folly and the politics of thirst

Diane Raines Ward, 2002
Riverhead books, 280pp, \$24.95
ISBN 1 57322 229 1

This book takes the readers on a world tour of the most hotly contested water climates, and presents some of the most passionate advocates to emerge from them.

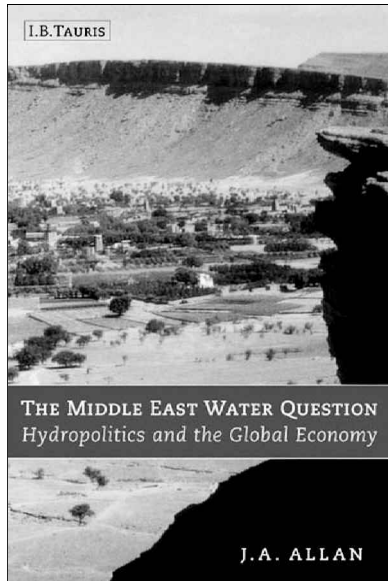
Why is the Fertile Crescent, historically one of the most lush places on earth, fast becoming a region of scarcity? What do Dutch watermen, steeped in their centuries-old, folkloric battle to protect their coasts, know about rising seas that we don't? Why are certain environmentalists so eager to dismantle thousands of years' worth of engineered solutions to distributing water? And how is it that the very technology vilified by conservationists may be the only thing that can save us? The author answers these and other paradoxical questions in a lively, readable style.

The Middle East Water Question: hydropolitics and the global economy

Tony Allan, 2001, I.B.Tauris, paperback ISBN 1 86064 813 4, £17

The Middle East Water Question is a book that explores in depth this hugely important topic and at a crucial time. Not only are many Middle Eastern states facing acute water crises, but past analyses of this problem have been rooted in simplistic assumptions about 'water scarcity' and conflict.

Professor Allan's insightful book is a significant departure from past narratives and employs methods and approaches of both political science and social theory to construct an original thesis on both the current crisis and the policy responses to it. It is an important read for both 'Northern' and 'Southern' policy makers and sector professionals. Having had privileged access to those involved in regional policy making processes, Professor Allan is also aware, however, that the absorption of new ideas and the resultant policy shifts can take decades. This book has a long time horizon, therefore, and probably an equally long shelf life.



In four parts, the book first examines the resource base of the region and the views on water held by both peoples and governments. This concern to understand the socio-political origins of policy narratives is at the heart of the analysis. Part two takes this further, demonstrating how the 'economics of water', so frequently assumed to dictate actions, is in fact subordinate to the political economies surrounding allocation and management decisions. The key is the decisional environment at the political level.

Linking this analysis to the global context, part three takes a broader international relations and legal perspective introducing regime theory as a new tool of analysis. The final section looks at the global North-South interrelationship and builds new explanatory models of policy origin, interrelationships between policy discourse and society and future trajectories for water policy in the Middle East and North Africa. Towards the end of the book Professor Allan shows how invisible 'virtual water' imports have provided governments in the region with politically expedient alternatives to the hard realities of water scarcity. This key thesis of the author's directly challenges the misconceptions of 'water wars'-type analysis of regional water scarcity and is a powerful call for more rational thinking on all sides and by both Northern scholars as well as Southern policy makers.

The major strength of the book is the range and depth of experience brought by the author and his links to policy communities both in the region and worldwide. But rather than simply synthesizing and analyzing their experiences, he is laying down a challenge to their embedded perceptions of the resource environment. We

can expect that this book and the thesis of 'virtual water' will have ripple effects for years to come.

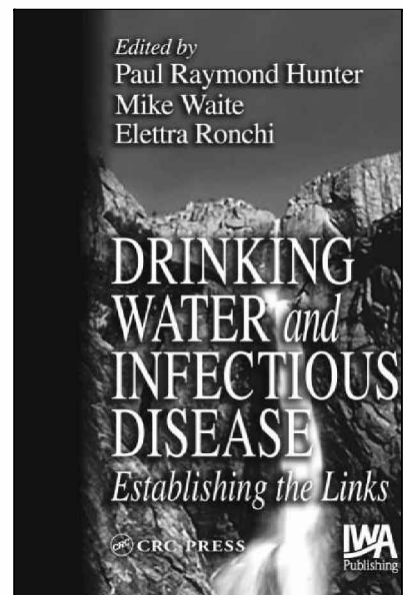
Alan Nicol is Head of the Water Policy Programme, Rural Policy and Environment Group, Overseas Development Institute, London.

Drinking Water and Infectious Disease – establishing the links

P.R. Hunter, M. Waite, E. Ronchi (eds) 2002, 248pp, £89, ISBN 1 843390 27 2

This book originated from an expert group meeting convened by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in July 2000, focusing on the need to improve techniques for investigating and preventing waterborne diseases. It is organized into three sections, each containing chapters from leading academics and researchers, and covering a broad range of practical and experiences, applied research and technological advances to provide methodologies and contemporary knowledge to others within the fields of epidemiology and health sciences.

The first section focuses on principles and components of surveillance systems in relation to the development and implementation of appropriate interventions to improve public health. Based on the fundamental principles of surveillance systems discussed in the first chapter, local, national and international surveillance levels are then considered in the next three chapters, including experiences from USA, UK and Sweden. These



innovative approaches utilize recent advances in information technology to monitor re-emerging and emerging diseases (e.g. cholera and legionnaires' disease), and to respond to potential public health threats related to climate change and bio-terrorism.

In the following section, various approaches to investigate disease outbreaks and to monitor microbiological water quality are discussed. The stages of outbreak investigation are described and the importance of outbreak detection is stressed. Three chapters focus on the use of routine information collected by water utilities. Statistical techniques (e.g. ARIMA model) and artificial neural networks for information analysis used to predict disease outbreaks are presented. Two chapters describe the value of microbiological indicators to investigate disease outbreaks, including Norwalk-like viruses (NLVs) and *Cryptosporidium*. The following chapters present case studies from USA and UK, and the latter describes the influence of *Cryptosporidium* on water quality legislation.

The last section focuses on the investigation of sporadic waterborne disease and discusses the quality of data and information. The analysis of data from existing surveillance systems to understand the transmission of waterborne diseases and the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are presented. In this section, the use of case-control studies and of time series analysis to study the epidemiology of water-borne diseases provide information about the relative contribution of contaminated drinking water to pathogen-specific disease. A prospective epidemiological study is presented as a valuable means of assessing the impact of endemic waterborne disease. Alternative intervention studies are proposed, based upon Canadian experience of monitoring illnesses associated with poor drinking water.

The methods described in the book have potential application in less developed countries. However, as briefly mentioned in the last chapter, these

methodologies may be limited by a lack of financial resources and may not necessarily be appropriate for application in low-income countries. Nevertheless, the book provides a major contribution in the development of improved methods to assess the safety of drinking water, to monitor the outbreaks of waterborne diseases and to design and implement mitigation strategies.

*Dr Luiza Cintra Campos,
Federal University of Goiás, Brazil.*

Thirsting for Efficiency: the economics and politics of urban water system reform

Mary Shirley (ed.) 2002, Pergamon, Washington, 376pp, \$100, ISBN 0 08 044077 0

This book aims to inform the reader about the effects of reform in urban water supplies, drawing lessons from six case studies in Conakry, Guinea; Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Mexico City, Mexico; Lima, Peru; and Santiago, Chile. In all these case studies, the reforms undertaken were compared against hypothetical 'what if' scenarios using indicators such as labour productivity, non-wage expenses, profitability, investment and net social benefits inferred from access, prices, waste and pollution. A key question considered is: 'Why do countries that have tolerated mismanagement of their water and sewerage system for decades develop a thirst for efficiency?' The contributing authors strive to determine the factors that govern the success or failure of urban water supply reform.

A main focus of this book is water utilities privatization, which is hardly surprising given its origins. The book is a World Bank/Pergamon publication, the contributing authors are all economists (and more than half World Bank employees or consultants) and the title contains the commonly cited privatization buzzword, 'efficiency'. Privatization (whether actual or hypothetical) was usually deemed to produce the most benefits in the cities in question. If a private concession failed to materialize, it is assumed that the political and institutional climate of the country is to blame, not privatization *per se*.

Most of the work cited dates back to the mid to late 1990s. In the fast-changing environment of the water industry, are the conclusions derived from these case studies therefore relevant to the twenty-first century? There are substantial and noteworthy lessons that can be gleaned from these case studies, namely the role of institutions and

politics in the fate of urban water utility reforms. However, these are very time and case specific, and are not necessarily transferable to other cities and countries. The social dimension of reform is not fully explored, and experience since the compilation of the book has shown that the benefits of privatization on paper are never wholly realized in practice due to social unrest and unforeseen circumstances beyond the private companies' control. This is typified by the numerous recent failures of transnational companies such as Suez, Vivendi, SAUR and others in Atlanta, Tucuman, Manila, Puerto Rico, Cochabamba, Grenoble, Toronto and Buenos Aires.

Having said this, the case studies give a very good and detailed account of the political and economic state of affairs that paved the way for reforms in the countries at that time. They highlight the fact that serious water sector problems alone are not what motivate reforms, but rather it is macro-economic crises that shift political circumstances, thereby changing the political desirability and feasibility of reform. And even though there is an apparent lean towards privatization, to their credit, the authors acknowledge the shortcomings of privatization in most cases. Yet, the book's useful insight into these particular cities' urban water reform history may only whet the appetite of readers who want to find out what has happened more recently.

David Bonnardeaux is an MSc student in the Water Management degree at Cranfield University, UK.

Books received

The State of the World Atlas

Dan Smith with Ane Braein
2003, Earthscan, London,
ISBN 1 84407 029 8, £11.99

This is a fully revised and updated version of a bold attempt to show how the nations of the world differ. The double-page map of the world is repeated about 40 times, and each map is dedicated to some aspect of our lives – for example, 'Population', 'Rich and poor', 'Malnutrition', 'Tourism' and 'Human rights'. Graphics are used imaginatively to cram in additional information: for example, the page on water use includes domestic water use per capita, total water use per capita, those countries importing over 75% of their water supplies, and those having less than 2700 litres per capita per day. An altogether fascinating read.

Europe's leading development bookshop – The ITDG Development Bookshop

Unless stated otherwise, all priced publications reviewed here can be ordered direct from the ITDG Development Bookshop: 103–105 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HL, UK. Fax: +44 20 7436 2013. Email: orders@itdpubs.org.uk

Alternatively, to order online visit: <http://www.developmentbookshop.com>