

waterpoints

Through Western eyes

According to reports from the USA, a new government tome, *Water in the West: The challenge for the next century*, has scored a masterstroke. Most Americans have no idea that agriculture still consumes 78 per cent of the water used in the west of the country, even though it contains nine of the USA's most rapidly urbanizing states — this exhaustive, high-level study embraces the notion that this has to change, and fast.

The report provides a useful rationale for freeing up more water for cities in the short term through water markets. It also states that few or no dams should be built and that water should be reserved to restore in-stream flows to dying rivers, revive fish populations, and recharge pumped-down aquifers.

According to *The Earth Times*, the report's greatest significance lies in the fact that it accepts and promotes the need to shift the region's water from its fields to its towns, from its past to its present and future.

Water in the West can be obtained from the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission, PO Box 25007, Denver, CO 80225-007, USA.

Southern Africa's crisis

According to an editorial in the June issue of *World Rivers Review*, Southern Africa 'is in a water management crisis'. 'Although water-supply departments and agencies are working under complex and demanding circumstances, and there are examples of successful water projects and policies, too often inefficiency, unfairness and unsustainability characterize the use and management of water resources in the region. Change will be slow and painful'.

The June issue carries stories which illustrate the current situation in the region, such as the World Bank's approval of the second dam in the Lesotho Highlands Water Project which is described as 'unnecessary for many years' — water-conservation experts fear that building it now will deter efforts to reduce water use, by forcing the regional water company to sell more water, not less, to help cover its share of the capital costs.

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New World Water Commission

At last August's Stockholm Water Symposium, Dr Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, President of the World Water Council, announced the formation of a World Commission on Water for the 21st Century. Its 'vision' for addressing water issues in the next century will be released on World Water Day, 22 May 2000.

The 21-member Commission — comprising experts and representatives of government, private sector and international organizations — will look at the impact of climate change; scenarios for population growth and spatial deployment; ways of reducing losses in monsoon areas and of increasing water harvesting in semi-arid and arid zones; as well as the possibilities for desalinization and tapping new underground water sources.

The Secretariat will be at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO, and is co-sponsored by the World Bank, FAO, UNDP, UNEP, and the World Meteorological Organization.

Mind the gap — a call for collaboration

Many rural communities are aware of problems with their water supplies — and have ideas on how to improve them, writes *Sally Sutton*. Some projects have tried to build on this, by providing 'low-technology' solutions or, more rarely, by indirectly encouraging improvisation and implementation from within the community.

But few seem to have been able to analyse which changes are purely cosmetic, and what really improves health, water-use practices, and 'well-being'. Lack of data on the impact of traditional source improvement (TSI) or upgrading means that many planners, technicians and politicians still assume that nothing less than a borehole and handpump, or a lined well with a bucket and windlass provide an acceptable supply, despite their championing of sustainability, and demand-driven approaches. This is particularly demoralizing for small



Paul Harris/IT

Living planet is drying up

We are now using half of the world's accessible freshwater supplies — double the amount used in 1960. This is just one of the alarming problems revealed in 'The Living Planet Report' recently published by the World Wide Fund for Nature, the New Economics Foundation, and World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

The report's authors say that the rate of decline of freshwater eco-systems is running at 6 per cent a year, threatening to dry up many wetlands, and push the species of those habitats to extinction.

The report says that governments should increase the efficiency of their water use, and stop wasteful irrigation schemes where water losses are highest.

communities, or those who migrate seasonally, who cannot 'qualify' in terms of sustainability and yet wish to take the first steps in improving their quality of life.

Now the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) is funding a national initiative in Zambia to provide a systematic approach to both the technological and social considerations of upgrading traditional water supplies. Over 25 per cent of the population (over two million people) still obtain drinking-water from unprotected sources; the project aims to build up a national capacity to enable these people to improve their own situation.

Expected outputs include:

- proven methods for replicable and affordable source improvements, primarily using local initiatives, materials and expertise;
- participatory modules which encourage community decision-making on technical options and water use/hygiene strategies, and management; and
- advocacy to incorporate low-cost solutions into national policy, district planning, and extension-worker programmes and training, and the international dissemination of the experience gained.

Both in looking at technologies and advocacy programmes to overcome beliefs and practices which may be barriers to change at all levels, this TSI research project would like to hear from projects and individuals with relevant experience; all inputs would be fully acknowledged. Within Zambia, please contact: I. J. Mbewe, National WASHE Co-ordinator, PO Box 308X, Ridgeway, Lusaka. Tel: 01 237491. E-mail: nwashe@zamnet.zm. Outside Zambia, contact: Sally Sutton, SWL Consultants, 14 Kennedy Road, Shrewsbury SY3 7AB, UK. Fax: +44 1743 351435. E-mail: suttons_swl@compuserve.com

Conference call

The First International Conference on Fog and Fog Collection took place in Vancouver in mid-July 1998. The conference brought together scientists working on fog-related issues with those in the development community who are using, or who wish to use, fog as a managed water resource. There were three main themes: the science of fog (physics, chemistry, meteorology, forecasting, etc.); the role of fog in sustainable forestry; and the role of fog collection in development projects.

The conference had many sponsors and endorsements. These are listed on the conference website, along with other information, at <http://www.tor.ec.gc.ca/armp/Events.html>. The proceedings of the conference, containing 125 papers, is now available from Dr Robert Schemenauer, PO Box 81541, 1057 Steeles Ave. West, North York, Ontario M2R 2X1, Canada. E-mail: robert.schemenauer@ec.gc.ca

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