

# books

## **Dams and Disease: Ecological design and health impacts of large dams, canals and irrigation systems**

**William Jobin**

**E & F.N. Spon, London, 1999.**

**580pp. Hbk. £60.00.**

This book aims to guide planners, engineers and public-health professionals involved in tropical water-resource development and disease control. The author proposes that water resources should be developed in such a way that health and social well-being are promoted without harming the environment. Whilst recognizing that this approach is not new, Jobin calls explicitly for a restructuring of the World Bank and the World Health Organisation (WHO), particularly in relation to their dealings with water and health.

The book is divided into seven parts. The first describes the health opportunities provided by water-resource management, along with brief descriptions of the main diseases associated with such water projects. The author calls for a clear restructuring of financial aid, and for the relevant lending agencies to integrate their development work with the international health, agricultural and social development agencies. The author, quite rightly, suggests that there must be 'a return to the use of local resources and talents', rather than a reliance on complex equipment, biocides and pharmaceuticals.

Parts two to six form the core of the book. Around 20 case studies document examples from the Americas, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, where water-resource projects have resulted in outbreaks of widespread and often lethal diseases among the 'beneficiaries'. A major chunk examines three cases: Puerto Rico, the River Nile in East Africa, and the Senegal River in West Africa. In each, the author provides a detailed historical background to water-resource development, and the resultant impact on the ecology and the community. In most of these projects the local people have been particularly affected by an increase in both malaria and bilharzia; the diseases so closely associated with developments of this kind.

Jobin reserves his greatest criticism for what happened in the Senegal River Basin, 'one of the most tragic examples of narrow-minded planning in Africa'. The project has resulted in a major epidemic of bilharzia, the blame for which he lays squarely at the door of the World Bank lending consortium, which included European governments. In particular, he condemns the poor advice meted out by the consortium's internal advisors, especially those in the health field. It is within this context that Jobin calls for the World Bank to use the WHO for health-impact assessments of water projects, as the 'present reliance on internal

World Bank advisors and short-term private consultants has clearly not been effective'. The author further suggests that irrigation and electrical power (two of the main reasons for the Senegal development), have become obsessions for the World Bank and the regional body which was established to manage the development, while health, traditional productive systems, and ecology are neglected. The final section of the book provides specific guidelines for planners, and an appendix of the ecology of major disease associated with water in the Tropics.

*Dams and Disease* is a fairly technical book, with the right mix of diagrams, tables, and photographs, which bring the whole discussion into sharper focus. Apart from some sweeping generalizations and, at times, a shortage of bibliographical referencing, the book is comprehensive. The main issues relating to the impacts on the local ecology and health of the population surrounding such large-scale water-resource management projects are dealt with well. It is useful to anyone involved in this type of project.

*Mike Ahern is currently studying for his MSc in Infectious Diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.*

## **Spreading the Word: Guidelines for research dissemination strategies**

**Darren Saywell and Andrew Cotton**

**WEDC, Loughborough, 1999.**

**ISBN 0 9060 5563 6.**

**Order online from**

**<http://wedc.ac.uk/publications.htm>**

Reviews the interim findings from Phase 1 of a Department for International Development (DFID)-funded project. The results are collated from a review of literature, case-study analysis, and interviews with key informants.

What is the current thinking in sector-based agencies, both in the UK and internationally? To find out, the authors carry out an initial analysis of common dissemination strategies, problems and constraints and the key factors that aid effective dissemination.

## **Ecological Sanitation**

**Sida, Sweden, 1998.**

**96pp. Pbk. £4.95.**

**ISBN 91 586 76 12 0.**

Urban and peri-urban areas in developing countries are among the worst-polluted and disease-ridden habitats of the world. Much of this pollution is caused by inadequate sanitation services. As cities expand and populations increase, the situation will grow worse — existing approaches to sanitation are neither viable nor affordable to the vast majority of people.

This book is about seeking new solutions in the form of 'ecological sanitation'. It discusses what is currently known about ecological sanitation systems, their strengths and weaknesses; and gives advice on the selection, design and management of devices and the support aspects so necessary for their success.



'Ian Calder brings his wealth of international research experience in hydrology to bear upon one of the most pressing problems of sustainable development. Scientific hydrology provides the evidence that integrated water resources MUST replace traditional engineering solutions to unchecked demands if a Malthusian water crisis is to be avoided. Hence 'revolution' is in the air. The book brings professionals and students alike up to date in the quest for strategic and operational actions to prevent 'hydrocide' in which the current water stress leads to human conflict and widespread ecosystem damage.'

*Malcolm Newson, Professor of Physical Geography, University of Newcastle*

Published by Earthscan at £15.95. ISBN 1 85383 634 6

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