

books

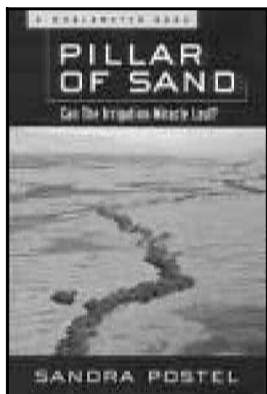
Pillar of Sand: Can the Irrigation Miracle Last?

By Sandra Postel.

WW Norton & Co/WorldWatch Books

Paperback 1999 313pp

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Sandra Postel tells us that the purpose of this book is to inspire those reading it to 'take up the global water challenge' – that is to say the challenge of growing enough food, in a sustainable manner, for the world's predicted future population. This is no mean objective, and Postel is not

alone amongst policy makers and planners in raising questions about the capability of existing irrigation technologies and wider food production systems to continue to feed the world's growing population beyond the first 20 to 30 years of the new century.

Where she differs from some is in her ability to set out a convincing and well-researched argument that has the potential of reaching a wide readership. The book has a very readable style and every point of argument is backed by examples and data from a variety of countries and contexts. At times she may be criticised for drawing too many examples from the central and western USA, but this is a nit-picking criticism since she also focuses on water scarcity in the Middle East, the environmental disaster of the Aral Sea and the over-exploitation of surface and groundwater resources in China, India and Pakistan, three countries which together contain 47% of the world's irrigated land (by contrast the USA contains just 9%).

Postel selects her facts to make a convincing argument that complacency and 'business as usual' are not tenable positions. We may take issue with some of the presentation and may want to bring counter-arguments, but nevertheless the case for the prosecution is well argued and demands our attention.

The chapter on institutions and water management has a great deal to say which is relevant to the rice schemes of Asia and beyond, and Postel confirms that there is much still to be done. Wisely Postel does not try to draw an overall conclusion. Her objective is to set out facts and leave the reader to respond. This is not a 'how to do it' manual but a 'makes you think' treatise for the policy maker and practical field worker alike. With a style that is easily read, this volume is probably essential reading for us all.

Mariëlle Snel

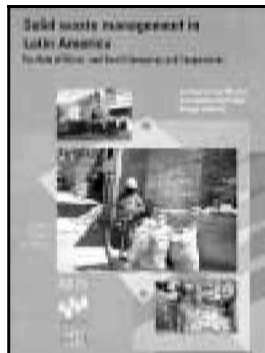
Solid Waste Management in Latin America: The Role of Micro- and Small Enterprises and Cooperatives

Jorge Arroyo Moreno, Francisco

Rivas Ríos & Inge Lardinois.

Pudhuvazhuvup Pathippagam (P) Ltd

(Chennai, India), Paperback 1999 194pp



The material in this book derives from a workshop on micro-enterprises involvement in municipal solid waste management in developing countries, which took place in Cairo in October of 1996. This workshop was organized by the

Urban Management Programme and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Three years onward and after a lot more in-depth research this book has been produced for both English and Spanish audiences. This book is specifically designed to serve as a guide for introducing effective change and improvement in solid waste management through the incorporating experience of the Micro- and Small Enterprises and Cooperatives (MSE/Coops).

The book is divided into two parts. The first three chapters provide an overview of solid waste management in Latin America, and the contribution of MSE/Coops. This section gives an overview of certain conceptual aspects of the solid waste management process.

The second part of the book specifically deals with a number of individual research results from specific countries, namely Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Each of the chapters are country specific and start with a focus on an overview of solid waste management system which means the collection, transportation, disposal and recycling of waste.

Overall, this book provides extremely significant information on SWM in general and specifically on MSE/Coops, which is much more limited as compared to water and sanitation research. Although over the past years more studies have been carried out on specific cities or countries dealing with this issue, far less research has reflected an attempt to investigate the function of MSE/Coop within a specific continent context.

This piece of work therefore provides an excellent understanding of solid waste management within the Latin America context. This book also contributes to creating a better comprehension of the functioning of informally based MSE/Coop and clearly fills in some of the research gaps about the functioning and development of micro and small enterprises.

Mariëlle Snel

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