

Review: The World's Water 2006-2007

By P.H. Gleick

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Water and food are vital for all forms of life; and water is vital for food production. For many, especially in developed countries, a plentiful freshwater supply is taken for granted but many people in developing nations encounter permanent water shortages which may become life-threatening. The significance of freshwater is reflected in the biennial reports produced by the Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security, an independent non-profit making organisation based in Oakland, California which was established in 1987. These reports have been produced since 1998-9 and provide data on global freshwater resources as well as a series of essays and briefs on specific water issues. The 2006-2007 report contains six essays, five briefs and 22 tables in the data section which occupies c.33% of the report.

In the current political climate it is hardly surprising that the first essay is on water and terrorism; that water is essential has made it vulnerable to attack through direct release and/or contamination or indirect compromise via its infrastructure. Numerous

historical cases are given as examples as are descriptions of potential chemical and biological attacks. Further essays focus on in stream water to maintain freshwater ecosystems which are often threatened by water removal, the history and present status of seawater desalinization to provide freshwater, and the occurrence and consequences of floods and droughts, problems which are also linked with global warming. The remaining essays consider water in the context, first, of environmental justice and, second, of business and risks which water businesses may face. The latter include water shortages and potential contamination, accidental or otherwise.

The briefs focus on bottled water production and consumption, international water conferences and the possibility of more efficacious small-scale workshops, and an up-dated water conflict chronology, beginning with events 5000 years ago, which occupies more than 25 pages. This is a valuable resource for historians of water. Two additional briefs provide "brief" diversions by way of the reproduction of a poem on water (which accompanied a book of photographs of water), and a comment summarizing the exploration of Mars and findings re water.

The data section is of particular importance in terms of a global overview of water consumption by region, nation and sector (i.e., domestic, agriculture, industry). Many of the tables make depressing reading; for example, people in some countries have less access to water and sanitation than previously, notably in Africa. Data on irrigation and cholera occurrence, as well as desalination capacity and overseas development assistance, provide a picture of global water-related issues.

This highly factual report provides data sets and useful graphs for those teaching courses on water resources as well as a summary on the current state of global water resources. Undergraduates, graduates, lecturers and policy makers should welcome the comments and value the tables in this reasonably priced Island Press book.

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