

BOOK REVIEW

Water for food security and well-being in Latin America and the Caribbean: social and environmental implications for a globalized economy, edited by Barbara Willaarts, Alberto Garrido and M. Ramon Llamas, Abingdon, UK and New York, USA, Routledge, 2014, ISBN 9780415713689 (hbk)

Latin America's position as one of the 'water towers' in the globalized economy is a topic of high relevance to global food security. Studies have been published, but none have provided comprehensive and accessible analysis in English. This edited volume provides an overview of the topic, covering local, regional and global aspects of 'food water' and 'non-food water' in Latin America and the Caribbean. The book follows a clear logic, providing new information from the global to the local levels. It is to be commended for distinguishing between 'food water' – the green and blue water which accounts for 90% of the water consumed by society in food supply chains – and the 10% (blue) 'non-food water' needed for households and industry. The 15 chapters provide crisp and clear analyses of pressing contemporary issues in Latin and Central America on the allocation and management of water. The book does not assert radically new ideas but does provide a lot of new information, as well as highlighting the key issues.

Given the enormous challenges of producing enough food for more affluent populations in the Asian Century, this edited volume, funded by the Fundación Botín, covers the numerous topics related to water and food security. It is notable that the editors avoided the trap of getting lost in case studies. Their approach enables the reader to understand key risks and opportunities. Very useful case studies are embedded in the different chapters – for example on the water–energy nexus (biomass and biofuels production) and the WASH sector (urban water supply and sanitation). Trade, governance, and water law are effectively addressed, as are the technical aspects of water efficiency, the complexities of integrated water resources management, the provision of ecosystem services and the role of stakeholders in water management. Each of the chapters starts with clear background information, and they contain fascinating metrics, maps and other evidence on how water allocation and management are structured. The editors and contributors present the evidence and arguments accessibly. The text will be useful for academic researchers as well as for stakeholders such as those in government, development agencies, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations. The book is to be warmly commended for targeting a readership beyond the water sector. By thinking outside the 'water silo', the authors provide food and energy stakeholders with relevant knowledge.

It is not possible to critique every chapter. The scope of the book can be usefully conveyed by some of its chapter titles – namely Chapter 2 on water resources assessment, Chapter 3 on trends in land use and ecosystem services, Chapter 4 on socio-economic megatrends, Chapter 7 on water and agriculture, Chapter 8 on urban water security, Chapter 9 on water and energy, Chapter 11 on water governance and Chapter 14 on legal frameworks. Chapter 2 provides the reader with a straightforward and clear understanding

of available water resources in the region. Chapter 3 connects the previous assessment with trends in land and ecosystem use. These two chapters, in association with Chapter 4, provide a very comprehensive understanding of what is at stake on the continent. The nature of water and food security cannot be effectively grasped without the economic and social data provided here.

The first section of the book delivers a broad overview to place food and non-food water in a wider development context. In Chapter 7, Maite Aldaya's expertise in water footprints is applied to Latin and Central America, and she provides new and informative figures and graphs. On 'non-food' water – in Chapter 8 – Enrique Cabrera and Emilio Custodio helpfully analyze the current and future problems in urban water supply, not only from a positivist Millennium Development Goals perspective. They also point at the real issues, which they frame within a wider context of socio-economic development driven by increasing social inequality. Chapter 9 covers issues in Latin America around the water–energy nexus. This topic is especially important because the water–energy nexus is currently one of the most hotly debated topics. Not surprisingly, a substantial part of the chapter is devoted to the role of biofuels in the economies in the region.

The final section provides some original thinking on governance, stakeholders and legal frameworks in Latin America. This gives the book a very useful concluding overview. However, while the key governance and legal challenges are well presented, the roles of stakeholders are remarkably depoliticized.

It is to be hoped that this book is the first of a number of publications on water resources in Latin America. Additional studies could address the lack of depth in politics. The title of the book suggests that global issues would be a significant element of the analysis. A proper perspective on the key role of South and Central America's water resources and food production in the global context is not really provided. It would also have been helpful, for example, to highlight the pressures that new Asian actors and Asian interests are exerting on Latin American agricultural markets. Some reference should have been made to the historic and current role of US and European hegemonies over agricultural trade in the region and the role of contract farming. Latin and Central America's agricultural production and trade are still partly shaped by Western investment and by Western agribusinesses and interests. A critical chapter on the role of the Washington Consensus would have added immense value. The reader should have been helped to understand the potential role of Latin and Central America's water resources and of their agricultural prowess in current and future global water and food security. It is recommended that these topics be on the agenda of the very competent scientists who have produced this first very important study on Latin America.

Water for Food Security and Well-Being in Latin America and the Caribbean is a very timely publication. It is a must-read for everyone interested in the topic. Despite its high price it should be made available to students of natural resources, agriculture, and development and regional studies in academic and non-academic libraries across the world to allow wide dissemination of its findings.

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