

Preface

In the three years since the launch of the first *World Water Development Report* at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto (March 2003), the world has witnessed considerable change. There have been many instances of major water-related disasters: the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami; the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes in the Caribbean, the west Pacific and the United States; the 2005 floods in central and eastern Europe as well as in many other regions; and the extensive droughts in Niger, Mali, Spain and Portugal. These are a constant reminder of both the destructive power of water and the misery deriving from lack of it in so many regions of the world.

These extreme events are the most prominent illustrations of fundamental changes that are affecting water resources worldwide. In many cases, this evolution is most probably linked to slow but persistent changes in the global climate, a phenomenon supported by a growing body of evidence. The combination of lower precipitation and higher evaporation in many regions is diminishing water quantities in rivers, lakes and groundwater storage, while increased pollution is damaging ecosystems and the health, lives and livelihoods of those without access to adequate, safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Major demographic changes are also seriously affecting the quality and quantity of available freshwater on the planet. While the more developed countries enjoy relatively stable populations, the less-developed regions of the world are generally experiencing rapid growth and population shifts, particularly in towns, small cities and mega-cities. In many rapidly growing urban areas, it is proving difficult to build the infrastructure necessary to deliver water supply and sanitation facilities to service the population, leading to poor health, low quality of life and, in many cases, to social unrest. To the urban demands for water must be added the increasing demands on water for food production, energy creation and industrial uses.

Large shifts in the geographic distribution of populations occur in various contexts, often adding to water supply problems and social tension. In areas, such as Darfur, there are both internally displaced persons and transboundary refugees. Legal and illegal economic migrants are swelling populations in parts of the United States, and Western Europe, as elsewhere. Increasing tourism to many holiday destinations often exerts a strain on the water supplies of these regions. Whether the result of continued unrest and warfare, terrorist activities or economic instability, population movement is a factor that has a substantial impact on water availability in the world.

It is against these changes in the global situation – some rapid and very noticeable, others insidious and yet persistent – that the governance of water resources must be assessed. This second Report, *Water, A Shared Responsibility*, sets water issues against this evolving background and places greater emphasis on governance issues.

It is proving extremely difficult for many governments to effectively confront the many intertwined issues concerning water. Not only is it difficult for departments within national governments to collaborate effectively, but problems are compounded when many management decisions have to be taken at sub-national and community levels, as the linkage and cooperation between different levels of government is often tenuous at best. The challenges for government agencies to link to NGOs and the private sector for resolving water issues further complicate management and decision-making. The task of managing water becomes even more complex when rivers flow from one country to another. The building of cooperative upstream-downstream relationships is becoming increasingly important with close to half of the world's people living in river basins or above aquifers that cross international borders.

An important goal of the World Water Assessment Programme – founded in 2000 at the request of governments within the Commission on Sustainable Development – is therefore to assist governments in developing their national water management plans. Thus, a number of case studies have been developed and included in the Report. In the first Report, 7 case studies involving 12 countries were included to illustrate the variety of circumstances in different regions of the world. Since then, the number of case studies has grown to 17 involving 41 countries. In a single volume, it is not possible to describe all case studies in detail. Thus we choose to summarize the case studies in the Report and publish the details of each study on our website. This strategy also allows us to make all the necessary updates as new data and information become available.

As we move through the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Life', 2005-2015, the World Water Development Reports will provide a series of assessments that will facilitate the monitoring of change in the water sector, both on a global basis and within a growing number of case study countries and river basins. The purpose of the Decade is to focus on the implementation of water-related programmes and projects, while striving to ensure cooperation at all levels, including the participation of women, to achieve the internationally-agreed water-related goals.

A number of issues identified by UN-Water as priorities for the Decade include coping with water scarcity, access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, and disaster risk reduction, particularly in Africa. The Decade aims to support countries in addressing the challenges and achieving the water-related goals of Agenda 21, the UN Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, as well as those of the 12th and 13th sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

The triennial World Water Development Reports will provide substantive content for the Decade's agenda (subsequent editions of the Report are scheduled for production in 2009, 2012 and 2015) and lay the foundation for a continuous, global monitoring system, pooling the unique perspectives and expertise of the 24 UN agencies that comprise UN-Water, in partnership with governments and other entities concerned with freshwater issues.

We trust that you will find this Report both informative and stimulating.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. J. Young', written in a cursive style.

Gordon Young
WWAP Coordinator