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Transboundary Water Management: Principles and Practice

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Transboundary Water Management: Principles and Practice

Edited by Anton Earle, Anders Jägerskog, and Joakim Öjendal. London, United Kingdom: Earthscan, 2010. 280 pp. £ 35.00. ISBN 978-1-84971-137-11 (hardback), 978-1-84971-138-8 (paperback).

The management of transboundary waters is a subject that has attracted a great deal of interest and concern among practitioners, academic researchers, and politicians in recent years. However, as the editors of this volume explain in their introduction, the literature is difficult to access because it is dispersed across several fields of inquiry, and many of the published articles deal with specific situations rather than general principles and practices. From their experience of offering international training programs on behalf of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the editors aimed to produce a single-volume work that would provide a much more accessible introduction to the core elements, challenges, and emerging solutions associated with transboundary water management (TWM).

In the introductory chapter, the editors argue that transboundary water resources play an important role in regional development and the maintenance of peaceful relations among nation states. However, the success of TWM often depends on the existence of adequate institutional capacity and the ability of water managers, researchers, politicians, and financial institutions to work cooperatively, even when faced with enormous challenges related to the scale, fragmentation and complexity of operations, and the diversity of vested interests that have to be taken into account. The volume seeks to shed light on the nature of these issues and challenges, and to review some of the best-practice responses, which have started to emerge from practical experience and more theoretical research in the past few years.

The volume itself is presented in 3 parts. The first part deals with analytical approaches to transboundary water management; it includes 3 chapters that deal with the importance of the political and economic landscape in understanding the nature of water use and conflict, the role of critical hydropolitics in analyzing the use of both overt and covert forms of power in the allocation of water, and the value of identifying and sharing water-related benefits as a means for avoiding or resolving conflicts among coriparian states or actors, respectively. Each of the 3 chapters provides clear explanations of the key arguments, theoretical approaches, and analytical concepts, and, as a whole, the chapters effectively frame the problem and illustrate the complexity of the hydropolitical and institutional challenges associated with TWM.

Part 2 is the largest section and includes 6 chapters that address key aspects of TWM polity and practice. The first of these chapters provides a useful review of the development of international water law over a 150-year period, including a discussion of how various legal principles have been interpreted by upstream and downstream states, and recent changes and innovations in legal provisions. This is followed by chapters that describe and assess tools available for the management of international aquifers, the arguments and approaches for stakeholder involvement, the relevance and use of environmental flows as a concept for TWM, and negotiation techniques and practices for resolving disputes. The final chapter in this section describes and assesses a range of alternative institutional models and also argues that TWM should be seen as a means to achieving mutually beneficial economic, social, and environmental outcomes rather than as an end in itself. Politicians and water management practitioners will probably find the chapters in this section particularly useful as specific approaches to TWM that have either been applied already or have the potential to be applied are described and explained.

Each of the 4 chapters in the final section looks at how TWM could be developed in response to the changing global environment and the prospect of even more intense competition among riparian states for access to water. The first of these chapters considers the requirements for resilient water agreements that are adaptive to change and enable benefits and costs to be fairly allocated among states and water users. The second chapter uses a common format and organizational structure to present 15 case studies of TWM initiatives from around the world. This is followed by a chapter that considers the role of enhancing and sharing knowledge as a basis for developing TWM capacity and the need for a new type of water professional who can use his or her skills as a facilitator, negotiator, and knowledge broker to collaboratively manage rather than solve problems. In the final chapter, the editors reflect on what has been learned from the development of TWM over the past few decades and the insights provided by the authors of the previous chapters. However, they also use this as an opportunity to question some of the generally accepted thinking and assumptions associated with TWM, and to argue that a more critical understanding of cooperative arrangements and processes is essential if more effective and equitable approaches to TWM are to be developed in the future.

This volume does achieve its aim of providing an accessible overview and introduction to some of the key issues and strategies associated with the management of transboundary waters. A good balance is achieved between theoretical arguments and practical insights from actual experience and case studies. The chapters are well written and clearly structured, and most of the illustrations are of a high quality. As such, this volume is ideal for those who are new

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to the field and require a general understanding before perhaps progressing on to some of the more specific and detailed literature on water politics, negotiation, and law, for example. The management of transboundary waters is set to become a far more serious, complex, and widespread problem in the next few decades, and this volume should prove to be a valuable resource for the politicians, practitioners, and researchers who are faced with the responsibility of dealing with it.

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