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Preface

Various studies and policy documents clearly indicate that water resources and services will be among the major challenges to mankind in the future. If things continue as they are, close to half of mankind will face water quality or quantity problems by 2050. We must find alternative ways of improving the management and governance of current and future water systems and services.

While running and walking in different parts of the globe, the first editor has been able to quench his thirst from public taps and drinking fountains. Especially during long runs on hot days water gives the stamina to push further and reach your destination. Yet, one rarely thinks about the system needed to provide this vital element. Even less thought is given to water governance after a water break as the run continues. Only when running through the poorest parts of a city do such thoughts tend to enter one's mind when passing children and women carrying water in buckets to their homes. The rich and poor alike should have access to safe water. Water governance is like a marathon. Much preparation is needed before coming to the starting line. In water services the marathon starting line corresponds to a situation where safe water is available for everyone. That's where the race begins.

The process of running a marathon is very complex as is the operation of water utilities and services. An optimal result can be achieved in many ways, but no hand book solutions exist. The political, environmental, social, technical, etc. conditions should be taken into account while struggling towards the optimal goal whether we are running a marathon or dealing with water governance. It should also be noted that the journey does not end at the marathon finish line or when optimal water services are in operation. Constant maintenance is required to keep everything in good condition. There is no time for long pauses.

Since the 1980s, the second (co-ordinating) editor has increasingly dealt with water governance: management, institutional, policy and even political issues of water services. Technology and technical artefacts are certainly important, but a lot of other issues also need to be faced. One of them is the everlasting debate on water pricing and the broader question of how water services – both community water supply and sanitation, often also stormwater – should be managed in different conditions? Since political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal conditions vary, the options for water services do also.

No universal solutions exist: each case has to be considered separately. Made decisions should be flexible enough for the operational environment that will change in the future while at the same time we should recognise and understand the limitations of earlier decisions about our systems. In spite of differences in the North and South, East and West, there seem to be also common things and issues – something that we can share and learn from each other.

During the years the third editor has worked in the water services sector, he has noted that most of the research conducted and literature written has been strongly focused on “solving” the problems of water services management. Given that we are still far from universal service coverage, the emphasis on providing such solutions is understandable. At the same time, many of the proposed solutions are quite ideological in nature. Success of solutions is often actively created and claimed with the aim of disseminating them. What lacks in this instrumental approach is critical reflection and research into how the sector is functioning. We agree that we must seek to develop solutions for the challenges facing the water services sector, but it is also important to conduct more critical empirical research on the functioning of the water services sector. Although there are a few notable exceptions among academics who engage in research which critically analyses the water services sector, they produce only a small share of the literature on the water services sector.

We, the editors, hope that this book and the 16 invited cases will for their part elaborate some key features of water governance and services in long-term perspectives. We are looking forward to reading further writings of the Governance and Management Series. It is also our hope that this book provides an impetus for further research critically analysing the institutions, policies and organisations which represent water services operating in different locations and conditions.

Foreword

Among the world's economic, social and environmental issues, the provision of water services and sustaining the water environment rank very high if not at the top. While some people regard water management as primarily a technological issue, history proves that institutions are as important as technologies and infrastructure in providing services across water supply, wastewater, and other water needs. Why this occurs is explained by the editors of this volume, which explains lessons about water services management and governance and now is welcomed to the IWA Publishing series on Governance and Management for Sustainable Water Systems.

Topics addressed in the series focus on institutions in the management of water, and they include important subjects such as governance processes, capacity-building, regulation and administrative law, social equity, and policy, among other topics. They reach across issues of sector governance such as water allocation and use; water supply and public health; wastewater and water quality; irrigation and drainage; instream flows; dam ownership; flood disaster management; and river basin and regional authorities. This volume focuses on water services, as the authors explain the nature of required governance by analyzing the shift in emphasis from technology to governance across a range of situations. These extend to water services across several continents and include discussions of management scenarios from urban water services to tradeoffs in water rights to environmental and health issues.

The reason that governance and management are so important is explained by the urgency of current global water issues that include water shortage and drought, rising sea levels, polluted water, floods, environmental degradation or other problems. As the first volume of this series explains, these problems point to the same conclusion: water must be managed effectively, fairly and sustainably to support survival and prosperity for all people and living things. This lesson has been taught successively in time, as the authors of this volume explain, and the lessons that resulted can inform us about how to manage and govern water sustainably in the future.

Ultimately, water management is a local issue and access to safe and reliable water services depends on local situations, even if they are influenced by global issues such as climate change. While many people have access to safe and reliable water services, billions lack access to it, and this leads to societal breakdowns,

sickness, disorder, and environmental degradation. More than technology, this is the result of inadequate governance. As the World Water Assessment Programme explained in its 2006 report *Water: A Shared Responsibility*, in many countries water governance is in a state of confusion with a lack of water institutions or fragmentation of authorities and decision-making structures that result in many unsolved water problems that cause misery and poor living conditions.

The editors and authors are to be congratulated for adding this volume on lessons from history to this series. It is our hope that the knowledge and light provided by the analyses provided will advance the cause of Governance and Management for Sustainable Water Systems.

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