



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

Book reviews

United Nations ACC/SCN *Fourth Report on the World Nutrition Situation*

UN ACC/SCN in collaboration with IFPRI, Geneva, 2000, 132 pp., available in paperback at accscn@who.org, free to developing countries, US\$ 15 to developed countries. Also available free on the Web at www.IFPRI.org

The series of reports on the World Nutrition Situation produced by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination/Sub-Committee on Nutrition of the UN (ACC/SCN), is one of those series of periodic publications by various agencies that is very useful to researchers and policy-makers. This particular report is not an annual publication, with the first one produced in 1987, the second in 1992, the third in 1997, and the fourth (reviewed here), this year, with intermittent “Updates”. The hallmark of these reports is the careful discussion of trends in nutrition, both stunting (now the preferred indicator of what used to be termed protein–calorie malnutrition), and micronutrient status. This discussion forms the subjects of Chapters 1 and 2, respectively. Chapter 5 contains a report on refugee nutrition, synthesizing material from the more frequent UN ACC/SCN “Reports on the Nutritional Situation of Refugees and Displaced Populations”, also a regular feature of the series. The remaining two chapters are more idiosyncratic, and in the fourth report consist of a detailed report on breastfeeding (Chapter 3), and brief highlights of current nutrition topics (Chapter 4).

The core value of the reports lies in the nutritional trend data presented in Chapter 1. Given that the underlying data are not collected annually, there is no advantage to an annual report, and the current 3–5 year interval between reports works well. Since the inception of these nutrition reports, there have been

several methodological improvements in the estimation of under-nutrition. The third and fourth reports use what is termed a “direct method” for interpolating data for the regional trend estimates. Country data are not available for stunting for all countries and for all years, so, pooled cross-section time-series are used to fit regressions with common regional slopes and individual country intercepts. (At some future date, there may be enough data also to permit individual country slopes).

As Cole points out in Appendix 3, this method of interpolation is preferable to what they term the “indirect method” of the first and second reports, still used today by UNICEF. In this latter method, stunting is regressed on data available annually (per capita GDP, infant mortality rate, calorie availability), and then, the trends in these underlying variables are used to predict regional levels of stunting. The direct method should give better results. The indirect method implies that UNICEF-sponsored community nutrition efforts, micronutrient interventions, or breastfeeding promotion have no effect, since they do not work on the underlying variables. Perhaps to convince the skeptical and to help settle the issue, the fourth report should have explicitly compared the fit using both methods.

Another methodological refinement in the latest report is the shift in reporting of regional data for stunting from the previous WHO regions to the UN regions. For nutrition this is particularly useful, since it separates South and Southeast Asia (combined as one WHO region), which have rather divergent trends in stunting. It is unfortunate that the UN regions could not have been used also in Chapter 2 on micronutrients, and hopefully the fifth report will make this change.

Another innovation of the fourth report is presenting data on nutrition over the lifecycle (again in Chapter

1). The ACC-SCN is not the first to be interested in this issue, but it is very useful to have the data that are available collected in one place. The chapter also identifies gaps in the literature, such as, the lack of a good methodology for nutritional assessment of the elderly.

Chapter 5 is extremely useful, and contains interesting and clear country-case-studies as well as a handy appendix with reference to online materials. I am not aware of another convenient source for these materials. The chapter has a long list of contributors, including many from NGOs, yet remains coherently organized. Chapter 3 on breastfeeding is useful, although does not add much to the existing reporting on the topic in other publications such as UNICEF's *State of the World's Children*.

Chapter 4 is, in my opinion, the least satisfactory chapter. In covering such a broad range of topics (urban malnutrition, the "human rights approach" to malnutrition and several other topics), it was only able to give a cursory overview of each topic. The treatment is too condensed to inform either those who are already aware of the issues, or those coming to the topic afresh. The human rights approach section, for example, is too brief to be more than essentially "banner advertising" for this important approach, about which many unresolved questions remain. The links among the different themes discussed are weak.

It appears that in Chapter 4, the very useful inter-agency collaboration in the report proved to be a weakness as well as a strength (the long list of contributors includes, in addition to individuals from the Secretariat of ACC/SCN, individuals from the World Bank, IFPRI, and UNICEF). There may be real differences in what the different agencies involved consider the key current nutrition issues. Therefore, the chapter ends up as a bit of a "shopping list" rather than a focused essay.

In summary, those interested in nutrition will want to read this report, and wait patiently for the fifth installment in another 3–5 years.

Susan Horton
Munk Centre for International Studies
Room 355s, 1 Devonshire Place, Toronto, Ont.
Canada M5S 3K7

Negotiating Water Rights

Bryan Randolph Bruns and Ruth Meinzen-Dick (Eds.), Intermediate Technology Publications, London, UK, 2000, 326 pp., US\$ 25.00, £ 14.95, paper back, ISBN 185339484x; Vistaar Publication (A Division of Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.) New Delhi, India, 2000, hard bound, ISBN 81-7036-878-2

Water rights are a key determinant of who gains or retains access to an increasingly scarce resource and how they use it, thereby influencing the equity and efficiency of water allocation and utilization. Improving the management of water resources is of critical importance, since in many parts of the world the increasing scarcity of water supplies is the most serious constraint to meeting future food demands, improving human welfare and protecting vital ecosystem functions. This volume makes a unique and valuable contribution to the literature by providing insight into the variety and complexity of water rights systems and how these systems determine patterns of water management. Such insight is necessary in order to devise policies and institutions that will lead to equitable and efficient outcomes in the face of increasing demands for water.

The volume includes 12 case studies on water rights in various regions around the world, with a preponderance set in South Asia and Indonesia. The analytical framework of legal pluralism is adopted throughout, in order to assess problems and opportunities in institutional reform and common property management related to water. With this perspective, the authors recognize the multiplicity of rights under which water may be claimed, including various types of legal rights, as well as a wide variety of customary rights. The analysis is not simply a dualistic juxtapositioning of customary versus legal rights however; but instead a fuller assessment of the various ways in which negotiations among the claimants are played out over time and space in terms of water access and management outcomes.

A critical aspect of improving the access to, and use of water is improving the performance of irrigation systems, which until now have frequently been plagued with problems of low efficiency and poor distribution. Increasing the capacity of water management systems to be more responsive to heterogeneous production conditions is one important area where improvements are needed. The structure of water rights

can facilitate or block this capacity. For example, in a case study from an Indonesian resettlement zone, the irrigators negotiated among themselves changes to the original project water allotments, based upon a set of “justifying criteria” which were commonly agreed upon. Factors such as texture of the soil and distance from diversion structures were thus taken into account, and a higher degree of efficiency in the system performance was achieved. An important factor in the successful attainment of flexibility was the recognition on the part of the project managers that farmer-negotiated allotments were valid. In contrast, a study from Bihar, India described how the incapacity of state water-management agencies to recognize the water right implicit in the access to the irrigation tank bed lands during off-season lead to an inflexible and inefficient management of water and land resources.

Facilitating collective action in the management of water resources is another key area in which improvements are needed in irrigation as well as other water uses. The physical nature of water resources gives rise to the generation of externalities such as the lower groundwater aquifers, decreased water quality, or upstream impacts on downstream users. Collective action is required to overcome the negative impacts of these externalities, regardless of whether the resource is held under private, state, or common property rights. As the demands on water resources increase, the need for even greater co-ordination among users is emerging, particularly at the basin or watershed level of management. A case study from Bali provided an interesting description of the process by which independent irrigation associations on a common surface water source were able to negotiate a co-operative agreement, which resulted in a more efficient use of the water resources and thus greater availability among a wider group of users. A key ingredient of this success was a negotiation process that did not threaten the existing rights of any of the participants, and that was facilitated by incentives to co-operate in the form of government-funded improvements.

Examples were given in several case studies, however, where government investment engendered conflict rather than co-operation among irrigators. A common problem among these cases was the lack of recognition of all the potential stakeholders who would be impacted by the investment and a failure to include them in the earliest stages of project planning.

In some cases, the projects overlaid new rights upon existing rights, while in others they strengthened the claims of one group over another. Invariably, the project authorities failed to engage in a process of consensus building among all potential claimants on the rights and responsibilities of water use.

In order to improve the distribution of access to water resources, it is necessary to understand the factors that might lead to a loss of access, and how the types of claims held by various stakeholders affect their vulnerability and negotiation options. The negotiation strategies adopted by claimants can take the form of formal legal proceedings, informal agreements, appeals to social values, or various forms of resistance, including illegal means of water acquisition. The strategy adopted depends on the type of claims held by the parties involved, the balance of power between them, or the nature of the conflict.

Technological change, increasing competition for water from urban and industrial sectors, and the impact of externally-funded projects were identified through the case studies as important forces for changes in access to water among claimants. For example, in Bangladesh, the informal right which households held over groundwater for domestic use was essentially extinguished through the introduction of mechanized pumps for irrigation use, which during the irrigation season lowered the level of the aquifer below the reach of the hand pumps utilized by households. In Indonesia, irrigators lost access to surface water in the face of increasing demand from the industrial sector due their lack of a legal claim to water, as well as the impacts of industrial pollution of the water source. The negotiation options available to the dispossessed claimants were limited by their relatively weaker political or social status, as well as the informal nature of their claim and the open access regime under which the resources they were dependent upon (groundwater, water quality) were managed.

Other case studies give some insight into how vulnerable groups can become more effective in claiming and accessing water. In New Mexico, assistance in the form of information provision and legal advice allowed small-scale and poorly-educated irrigators to engage in a complicated legal process, and in so doing, protect their claims to water. In Pakistan, the capacity to lease groundwater under informal agreements has increased access to the resource among

those incapable of investing in their own tubewells. Additionally, joint ownership of tubewells offers the potential for increasing access to water among small-holders, although institutional mechanisms to facilitate collective action among the owners are necessary for this to be effective.

The volume concludes with a chapter outlining an agenda for future research and action. The focus is on improving the capacity of the various stakeholders involved in water management in negotiating equitable and efficient solutions. Research and policy actions in the area of renegotiating rights under new project schemes, formalizing various aspects of water tenure,

improving the capacity to manage at a basin level and managing intersectoral demands for water are the areas identified with the most pressing needs.

Leslie Lipper

Agriculture Sector in Economic Development Service

Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N.

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100, Rome, Italy

Tel.: +39-06-5705-5342; fax: +39-06-5705-5522

E-mail addresses: leslie.lipper@fao.org

leslielipper@usa.net (L. Lipper)

PII: S0169-5150(00)00125-0