

Book Review: Water and Development: Good Governance After Neoliberalism edited by Ronaldo Munck, Narathius Asingwire, G. Honor Fagan and Consolata Kabonesa

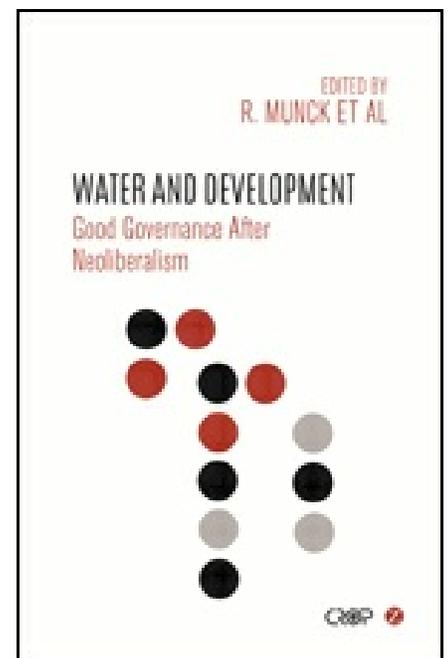
*In the edited collection **Water and Development: Good Governance After Neoliberalism**, editors **Ronaldo Munck, Narathius Asingwire, G. Honor Fagan and Consolata Kabonesa** approach water as an essential public necessity. The book examines global, national and local initiatives of water governance, focusing particularly on issues of gender, technology and climate change through studies of Sub-Saharan Africa. This volume is a well-structured introduction to the topic of water and development that shows the necessity of harnessing global initiatives through deep understanding of local contexts, writes **Kathleen Chiappetta**.*

Water and Development: Good Governance After Neoliberalism. Ronaldo Munck, Narathius Asingwire, G. Honor Fagan and Consolata Kabonesa (eds). Zed Books. 2015.

What is the water crisis? Is it not having enough water to support our growing world population? Is it failing to adequately manage our water supply and ensure all have access to this resource? In *Water and Development: Good Governance After Neoliberalism*, edited by Ronaldo Munck et al., twenty authors scrutinise the current situation, development standards and global, national and local initiatives of water governance. The book is usefully divided into two parts: the first highlighting theoretical debates on power, equity and politics, and the second engaging with localised issues in Africa, particularly those relating to gender, climate change and technology. The unifying argument is the need for 'a participatory and sustainable approach to water which recognises it as an essential public necessity' (back cover).

One of the main reasons that this book is an excellent introductory text to the issue of water and development is the clarity with which the authors begin their discussions. They do not assume that the reader has an understanding of the topic or knowledge of the differing perspectives. Chapter One gives the reader a historical overview of development paradigms, highlighting how each one has impacted water and development. From the late nineteenth century to the 1980s, the main approach to water and development was rooted in the 'hydraulic mission' – the notion that water is a technical issue, based on science and enlightenment, and not a political one (14). By the 1990s the neoliberalist agenda had seeped into water development projects. This perspective made water a commodity: 'an economic good [...] with its price set by free market mechanisms' (18). Within the current hybrid models, the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) paradigm has redefined how agencies, countries and organisations are trying to improve water governance. IWRM is 'a move away from traditional large-scale and capital-intensive solutions towards a more sustainable, low-tech approach which also emphasizes the gender dimension' (11-12). It is this paradigm that provides the springboard for the discussions that follow.

Building on the reader's knowledge of development models, in Chapter Two the authors argue for a more holistic approach to tackling the water crisis by paying particular attention to the social, ecological and technological dynamics at play. Water is a politicised issue and policy debates need to address the reality of those who live in



poverty. In Chapters Three and Four, issues of governance in Sub-Saharan Africa are highlighted. One of the most notable chapters of Part One is Larry A. Swatuk's exploration of whether IWRM can actually work to alleviate poverty in this underdeveloped region. He concludes that 'an absent state can never build the type of social capital necessary for either good water governance or IWRM to thrive' (79).



Image Credit: Children at a Newly-Installed Hand Pump in the Village of Jedane, Ethiopia (Wikipedia Public Domain).

Overall Part One provides the groundwork upon which Part Two builds. Through explaining key terminology and overarching theories, it leaves few questions unanswered and it supports the ensuing discussions. Part Two delves deeper, looking at the major power dynamics that impact access to water, particularly in Uganda. This section begins by giving an account of the situation in this country. Using information obtained through surveys, the authors provide a comparative snapshot of the people who reside in rural Uganda, highlighting information on gender, age, income, etc. This information is well depicted through figures and the chapter is also filled with maps indicating both working and non-working improved water sources within the surveyed area. The following chapter uses this demographic information to hone in on the plethora of actors involved in water governance in Uganda. The authors look at the relationship between, and roles of, central governments, districts, development partners, communities and NGOs in supporting Uganda's institutional framework for improving rural water supplies.

Another aspect to IWRM is its emphasis on gender equality. The next two chapters of *Water and Development* focus on women and their daily interactions with water. Despite women traditionally being 'domestic water keepers' (168), they do not typically play an active part in building or maintaining improved water sources and/or participating in community-level water governance due to pre-existing socially acceptable gender constructs. This is simply another example of the disconnection between policies and reality, a distinction made in Chapter Seven. Richard Bagonza Asaba and Fagan write that 'a façade of opportunity is presented in these policy arrangements wherein women's empowerment is conceptualized as an outcome [...] At best it presents an impression of opportunity that the women have little or no way of seizing' (169).

The next chapter showcases another group of people who are affected by changing water policies. Agro-pastoralists are nomads that move their livestock across rural Uganda. While they have been able to adapt to the impact of climate change on water resources, they are struggling to deal with agrarian policies and newer types of businesses

such as cultivating eucalyptus trees and brick-making: activities that both require water. Another aspect discussed is technology and the need to ensure that local communities can properly maintain the water equipment that is built. The main point that emerges from this chapter is the need to invest in technology that ensures functionality and meets communities' needs while keeping in mind their social makeup.

One unique aspect to *Water and Development* is the various methods that the researchers use to shed light on localised situations. With regards to understanding the movements of agro-pastoralists, the author uses GPS data to trace where they travelled throughout the study period. In addition, surveys, interviews and demographic statistics all contribute to instilling in the reader a comprehensive understanding of IWRM. This book is properly structured so that each chapter builds upon previous ones. Definitions, concepts and terminology such as the 'nexus approach' that are introduced in one chapter are used and enforced in the following chapter. It is for this reason that this book is an excellent introductory source on water and development. One of the only drawbacks is that while the authors strive to present clear arguments that refer to topics discussed in the preceding chapters, sometimes it becomes repetitive, such as in constantly referring and defining [Millennium Development Goal 7.C](#): namely, 'halving the proportion of the people without sustainable access to safe drinking water' (30).

Despite this, *Water and Development: Good Governance After Neoliberalism* is a worthwhile read in highlighting different perspectives on IWRM. It gives a realistic view of the problems that exist when investing in global initiatives without realising the particular social, environmental and economic situations of local communities.

Kathleen Chiappetta has a Bachelor of Journalism Degree from Ryerson University in Toronto and a Master of Science Degree in Global Politics from the LSE. Over the years she has written and produced pieces on national and international issues such as agricultural and maritime trade, engineering education and Irish migration. She has worked for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Geneva, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris and the High Commission of Canada in the United Kingdom. [Read more reviews by Kathleen Chiappetta](#).

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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