

ADB Foreword

The *Asian Water Development Outlook 2007* is a contribution by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to make a forward-looking assessment of the possible water future of the world's most populous region. It is now increasingly being recognized that water is likely to be a major critical resource issue all over the world, and that the social, economic, and environmental future of Asia is likely to depend on how efficiently and equitably this resource will be managed in the coming years.

The *Outlook* is aimed at Asian policy makers and those interested in understanding the complexities and dimensions of current and future water problems, and how these can be addressed successfully in policy terms. Its main objective is to raise awareness of water-related issues and to stimulate an informed debate on how best to manage Asia's water future. These are important and complex issues, and their timely management can contribute to the achievement of all the water-associated Millennium Development Goals and beyond.

This report brings together a wide range of water-related issues, problems, and challenges from a future-oriented, multidisciplinary, and multisectoral perspective from around the Asia and Pacific region. Highlighted are important topics that have been neglected or are being inadequately considered in most countries of the region. Among these is the urgent need to address the inherent interrelationships between water and other important development-related sectors, like energy, food, and the environment. The future of Asian countries will be determined not by developments in any one of these sectors but rather in the interactions among all of them. Developments in all of these sectors will affect water, and, in turn, water developments will affect all these sectors. The accelerating change in demographics, such as rural–urban migration and an increasingly elderly population, is another unexplored area with major implications for water management. Many developing countries may risk mortgaging their water security in a decade or two if sanitation is used in a restricted sense of collecting and transferring untreated sewage to another area thereby contaminating freshwater sources. The importance of South–South knowledge and experience transfer in an Asian context through the identification and objective

analyses of good practices is emphasized.

The report is cautiously optimistic on Asia's water future. It points out that with existing knowledge, experience, and technology, the water problems of the Asian developing countries are solvable. The main constraint is not physical scarcity of water, though this could be an issue in some areas, but inappropriate management practices.

The *Outlook*, which is expected to be the first of a series of analyses on the future water situation of Asia, focuses on urban water and wastewater management. It notes that the status of provision of clean and drinkable water continues to be a serious concern in many Asian urban centers. Of even greater concern are inadequate wastewater management practices—collection, proper treatment, and safe disposal of wastewater. As a result of this neglect, water bodies in and around urban centers are often seriously contaminated, affecting the health of both people and ecosystems. However, to improve the situation, there must be reliable data on physical as well as social, economic, and environmental factors, presently lacking in many countries, on which to base sound policies. Solving urban drinkable water and wastewater problems will require strong political will, accelerating demand from civil society to solve these problems, adequate financial and managerial support, and intensive capacity-building efforts at all levels.

The report is an independent analysis commissioned by ADB, and is the result of a collaborative effort by a team of eminent experts led by Prof. Asit K. Biswas, and ably supported by Mr. Geoffrey Bridges, Mr. Arthur McIntosh, Prof. Bhanoji Rao, Prof. Olli Varis, and Dr. Geoffrey Wright, with support from ADB's Water Community of Practice. The report will help policy makers and civil society better understand the various issues associated with water, aiming at developing a common approach to meet the major challenges.

ADB's commitment to the sector is shown in our Water Financing Program 2006–2010, in which investments in water are expected to double and be directed toward reforms and capacity development programs in rural communities, cities, and river basins; and in the associated Water Financing Partnership Facility to mobilize cofinancing and investments from development partners. We encourage other partners to join us in this crucial endeavor.



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