

Book reviews

Herstory: Migration Stories of African Women in Ireland

compiled by Olutoyin Pamela Akinjobi, Dublin: AkiDWa, African Women's Network, 160 pp, €10

AkiDWa was founded in 2001 by Salome Mbugua and six other women in order to provide a representative body and social network for African women in Ireland. It aims to promote equality and social justice for African women in Ireland. *Herstory* is an AkiDWA project, and details the first-hand experiences of ten African women, compiled by freelance journalist, Olutoyin Pamela Akinjobi.

The format of the book is simple. An introduction to an African country, usually sourced from an internet site, is followed by an account of the circumstances in which a woman from that country found herself making her way to Ireland. A small colour section at the centre of the book contains photographs taken at various AkiDWa events, and also has a reference map.

There are few things as powerful as a person's own story. It is easy to dehumanise migrants and asylum-seekers. It is not so easy to ignore the stories of women who have faced incredible challenges in their lives.

The experiences of women from Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Congo, Nigeria, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, South Africa, and Kenya are very different. Yet certain themes, such as facing radical insecurity, the negative legacy of colonialism, and the special challenges faced by African women as they attempt to secure an education run through many of the stories.

Perhaps the most harrowing description, in a book full of harrowing descriptions, is Nina's account of watching her friend Onome undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). Five men pinned Onome down, and using unsterilised instruments, carried out the procedure that would eventually leave Onome suffering from a terrible infection that threatened her fertility. Many young girls die from shock or blood loss, or suffer lifelong complications. Fleeing from the prospect of FGM becomes a recurring theme in

Nina's life, first when two strange men come to tell her that they wanted to take her from secondary school at the request of the head of the village, a traditional chief. After an unhappy first marriage, her second husband Frederick converted to Islam, and tells her that she and her little daughter, Lucy, will have to undergo FGM. This is the event that precipitates her flight to Ireland, and she has to leave Lucy behind with her sister.

This story illustrates one of the frustrating aspects of the book. The author has decided to focus on the lives of the women before they came to Ireland. Yet for Irish readers, it would be fascinating to see how the women fared in Ireland. For example, sometimes we do not know what has happened to children. At other times, we are told that women have begun to work almost immediately in Ireland and have saved enough to bring a child here. Given that asylum-seekers are not permitted to work, questions are left hanging as to how this happened. It would have been very valuable if we were allowed to see how the women adjusted, and what strategies they used to do so.

The strengths of the book lie in the fact that situations that may have only been witnessed on the news become sharp and immediate when viewed through the eyes of someone who has lived through the events. Mary from Rwanda left the country in the middle of her fourth year in secondary school. She had been cared for and educated by a cousin when the price of coffee dropped sharply in the late 1980s. Her father, a coffee farmer who had up until then been able to support a family, was no longer able to do so, and as is common in some African countries, the extended family stepped in. When the genocide began between Batutsi and Bahutu, Mary's home was attacked by Batutsi, and she was taken to a temporary camp where she witnessed torture and chaos. Her cousins fled to Ireland and sent for her. Her greatest fear, as the youngest of seven, concerns what has happened to her family.

The stories are uneven, perhaps reflecting the greater ability to articulate their experience which some of the women had. The book provides a useful introduction to the reality of life for people who now make their homes in Ireland. It would be also useful if there were a follow-up volume that traces how these women have adapted to life in Ireland, and what challenges met them in a culture so very different from the one they left behind them.

Breda O'Brien

Escaping Poverty's Grasp:

The Environmental Foundations of Poverty Reduction

David Reed, London: Earthscan, 2006, 206 pp.

It is hard to plead ignorance on the formidable new challenges for the globe and its people associated with climate change and global warming. Harder still to ignore evidence collected over the last decade on how the abuse of the environment threatens rural livelihoods, especially of the poor who live in risk prone areas with scarce resources. The complexity of environmental management involving millions of daily decisions made by poor farming families as well as those imposed by elites, governments, corporations, national and international institutions does not make for easy solutions. Conflict for control over the ownership and management of natural resources is on the rise within developing countries and much of this conflict is primarily livelihood based, involving the poor pitted against governments, land grabbers, illegal loggers and open cast miners. Against this backdrop David Reed, director of the World Wildlife Fund's macro economic programme, examines the evidence from a four year intervention in five developing countries, for new ways to promote linkages between local and national level institutions to reduce poverty while at the same time enhancing conservation and environmental protection.

The book promotes a conceptual framework called the 3 x M approach, described as "revolutionary", to help understand poverty dynamics. The 3 Ms stand for micro (local), meso (district) and macro (national) and Reed argues that change must begin at local level and aim at policies and institutions at higher levels to reduce the obstacles that keep rural people in poverty and degrade the environment. If this is a revolution it is a tame and timid one which largely ignores the theoretical and practical implications of work carried out by political ecologists¹ in the last two decades and sets aside the more challenging vision of social justice and environmental conservation, driven from below, popularised by

Chambers in his sustainable livelihoods approach.² The knowledge acquired here comes from a rigid top down approach, desk designed and it is hard to discern the choices and voices of the poor³ in its final recommendations. Indeed while some of the empirical studies used local focus groups to gather information, the requirements for the field teams stress “expert” knowledge, national advisory committees of “eminent” persons, external strategic planners, close links to private sector and national level decision makers. This leaves the reader with the sensation that this was a highly technocratic approach to what is essentially a political issue of resource distribution.

The individual case studies carried out in China, Indonesia, El Salvador, South Africa and Zambia are fascinating, at times passionate, highlighting the diversity and ingenuity of poor people world wide in their search for social well-being. They reveal a world of conflict past and present over land, water, forests. Places like Riemvasmaak in South Africa filled with “emotions and the tragic past” of the apartheid era or La Montanona in El Salvador where the victims of 15 years of civil war and exile attempt to reconstruct livelihoods against the resistance of a government determined to punish its former opponents. The Indonesian and Chinese studies are particularly timely as they explore forms of conservation which are currently popular across the developing world, namely government managed reserves or protected zones, many established precisely to undo the damage of excessive previous exploitation of concessions granted to private individuals or companies. In both countries local people’s rights have been ignored and sustainable land use concepts have to compete with poor people who cannot see why they should give up illegal logging when it has brought such obvious benefits to the elite.

The Chinese study in Yunnan describes the plight of farmers driven by hunger to engage in illegal logging and killing of wildlife, illicit activities being essential for survival. The researchers were not shy about exposing the conflicts between poor people’s welfare needs and government policies for watershed protection designed far away in urban offices. They openly confront the lack of political will at local government level to enter into arrangements for the management of natural reserves which involved shared decision making with local people. There are surprises too in Zambia where the field team produced an unexpectedly candid assessment of local state capacity describing civil servants’ workplaces as “perches from which to survey the surrounds for income supplementation opportunities”. Hardly likely to produce the win-win outcomes that the book seeks for both the poor and the environment.

There are some important lessons for donors too in these pages. The South Africa study warns of the complexity of “the forms and procedures” of professional development workers that may deprive those most in need of investment. Despite the extraordinary differences between the political systems in the five countries, what emerges is a similar pattern of how the slimmed down minimal state of the Washington Consensus has simply abandoned rural areas and left the tasks of tackling poverty to NGOs and foreign donors. From these studies comes a unified cry for more government attention for rural areas. They produce evidence of the growing inequality between rural and urban life. The rural poor have fallen behind their urban peers in terms of political mobilisation and their voices are not being heard where macro economic policies are being designed.

Aside from gems buried in the case studies there is nothing startlingly new in this book and the recommendations in the concluding chapter are mild suggestions for action directed at civil society organisations, governments, bi and multilateral institutions. After all the World Bank *World Development Report* of 2003⁴ reached similar conclusions on the role of institutions in rural transformation and indeed went further in its demands on governments to prioritise poor people in the allocation of rights to land and water. The main rationale for the book appears to rest with World Wildlife Fund’s desire to come up with a new theoretical model linking poverty reduction and the environment. However less than 30 pages of the book are given over to the theoretical development of the 3 x M approach and little of that is convincing. What emerges as convincing and authentic are the case studies, with nuggets of knowledge, chipping away at institutional cant and archaic bureaucratic behaviour, not afraid to tackle politically sensitive issues and delivering judgments peppered with disenchantment on the performance of governments and state environmental and rural development agencies.

Sally O’Neill

Footnotes

- ¹ For an overview of political ecology’s contribution to environmental analysis see the work of Pect and Watts (1996) *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, London: Routledge.
- ² Chambers, R. (1983) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, London: Longman
- ³ Indeed the book totally ignores the methodological innovation of collecting poor people’s knowledge articulated in the World Bank study *Voices of the Poor* published by Oxford University Press, 3 volumes, 2000.
- ⁴ World Development Report 2003, *Sustainable Development in a dynamic World: Transforming Institutions, Growth and Quality of Life*, New York: World Bank and Oxford University Press

The White Man's Burden:

Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done so Much Ill and so little Good

William Easterly, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

In the search for solutions to global poverty, the only big answer is that there is no big answer. This is the key message of William Easterly's *White Man's Burden*. By accepting their inability to be the driver of economic development in developing countries, aid agencies would be liberated to focus on the many useful things they can do to meet the desperate needs of the poor and give them new opportunities.

Easterly, a senior research economist at the World Bank for over 16 years, now Professor of Economics at NYU, makes a passionate call for a shift from "the big plan" approach, exemplified by the UN Millennium Project and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to a move towards "bottom up" planning with an emphasis on finding out what works locally.

Currently aid agencies are given weak incentives by sharing collective responsibility for broad goals and need instead to be held responsible for more specific and measurable tasks, he argues. Aid agencies should specialise in the sectors and countries they are best at helping. Then they should be held accountable by a truly independent evaluation of their efforts. The problem with goals like the MDGs is that everyone and no one is responsible when they are not attained. He concedes that there is much political expedience implicit in this state of affairs that works against a change in approach.

How can the poor give more feedback to more accountable agents on what they know and what they most want and need? This is the question we should be asking, he stresses. Aid should be first and foremost about being accountable to the beneficiaries. Currently, there is a chronic lack of feedback from and accountability to the poor. In his attempt to highlight the importance of the feedback problem in foreign aid, Easterly uses the following splendidly tortuous metaphor: "the difficulty of foreign aid agencies is that a bureaucrat is controlling the

thermostat to the distant blanket of some poor person, who has little ability to communicate whether she is too hot or too cold”.

The poor are not listened to because they have no money to motivate the market to find solutions to their needs and little political power to make their needs known. One wonders what Easterly makes of NGOs’ attempt to redress political power imbalances by aiding civil society actors. Does he believe these piecemeal attempts at political transformation to be as hopelessly misguided as donor conditionality? The issue is not addressed.

So why does Easterly believe big plans are doomed to fail? Simple: economic and political complexity makes big plans fail. In a chapter on making markets work, Easterly echoes Stiglitz’s emphasis on the importance of institutions. He argues that free markets cannot be introduced from the top down: to believe that they can be is to overlook “the long sequence of choices, institutions and innovations that have allowed free markets to develop in the West”. Effective free markets can only develop from the bottom up as the social norms and institutions that make markets function develop organically.

The track record for major development plans shows them to be infeasible. There is inadequate information and a lack of coordination between aid agencies and there is no reason to assume that the goals can be attained at a reasonable cost with the available means. In a damning chapter on the response to the HIV and AIDS crisis, Easterly condemns the current over-emphasis on treatment of those infected at the expense of focusing on preventing the further spread of the virus and cites the failure of the aid community to tackle the epidemic as an example of how ineffective top-down planning has been.

Easterly himself is clearly no rigid, reactionary, free market ideologue. He criticises the arrogance and lack of humility of big planners of all ideological persuasions; all forms of social engineering; those who argue for massive state intervention, yes, but also proponents of economic “shock therapy” and structural adjustment who believe they can create functioning markets overnight; or military interventionists who believe it a good idea to invade countries in the name of democracy.

On governance and corruption, Easterly does not have anything particularly new to say and echoes the work of others such as Van de Walle and Lockwood. His views can be summed up as follows: poor country governments are bad and western attempts to change them have been fruitless. He argues that attempts from the west to impose democracy from the outside do not work. Government accountability needs to be to its own citizens not to another government. Easterly is scathingly critical of donors’ inability to deal

with the “irresolvable conflict between sovereignty and conditionality” and of the damage that the burden of donor reporting has placed on developing countries’ governments.

He sides with the argument that trade and investment and not foreign aid are the primary determinants of economic growth. Burnside and Dollar’s influential research, which concluded that aid in conjunction with sound economic policies could be correlated with economic growth, has been used by many to support the case for increased aid. But Easterly and Levine using the exact same techniques as Burnside and Dollar (with newer data) found that no such conclusion could be reached. NGO research has argued that the ineffectiveness of aid can largely be attributed to the amount of tied or “phantom aid” in development budgets, but Easterly argues that even untied aid is not correlated with economic growth.

Thus, he recommends focusing aid on narrow and solvable problems – areas where the link from efforts to inputs is simpler, health and education, nutrition, water, electrification – rather than grand goals of overall economic growth.

Wisely, Easterly urges development workers to get out in the field more, talk to the poor, design feedback mechanisms such as surveys and experimenting with what works in local conditions. He argues that smaller interventions allow for more rigorous evaluation. Aid agencies need to allow their staff to spend time learning about a particular sector in a region. Experienced staff on the ground should then be allowed decide what is working and what is not. Instead, the current practice in aid agencies is for staff to be constantly reassigned across countries and sectors, a trend that works against the gathering of local knowledge.

While Easterly has important points to make about the need for improved impact assessment, locally driven development and accountability to the poor in the aid sector, reading the above list of the areas on which he believes aid agencies should focus, it is fair to ask how different are his goals to Sachs’? (Sachs is his academic adversary, the archetypal development big planner.) The difference is perhaps more in approach and tone than overall aims: after all, there is much that is specific and measurable in Sachs’ development vision too.

And even if we must accept Easterly’s criticism of the quality of aid, one does wonder why can’t we increase the quality and quantity of aid at the same time? Ultimately though, Easterly’s book is a challenging, thought provoking, dense, well written and researched piece of work that any development professional would benefit from reading.

Alan Whelan

NGO Accountability:

Politics, Principles and Innovations

Lisa Jordan and Peter Van Tuijl (Editors), London: Earthscan, 2006

The debate around NGO (non-governmental organisation) accountability has changed emphasis repeatedly over the past 30 years, during which NGOs established themselves as permanent players in development. The editors, in order to facilitate the reader, begin the book by exploring the syllogisms and assumptions prevalent over this time in order to describe this debate. They then go on to provide an overview of the book, also indicating that the range of authors means that different points of view are reflected and that accountability is being explored from a variety of angles.

Nevertheless, this introduction barely prepares the reader for the diversity of thought in the remainder of the book. Steve Charnovitz starts off by very eloquently exploring how accountability is linked to legitimacy and representativeness, to what extent NGOs might be expected to be accountable, and to whom. Taking a standpoint from outside the NGO world, his discourse seems to be addressed, to an extent, at the relatively hostile environment towards NGOs prevalent in the United States in the latter half of the decade, and which has been critical of the legitimacy of NGOs as constructive democratic players. Starting off with *Rerum Novarum*, the 1891 Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, Charnovitz takes the reader through a plethora of views regarding the legitimacy of civil society organisations. While many critics discount NGOs as valid contributors to the cause of democracy, others highlight the value of civil society organisations if they are free to organise, free to speak, and free to self-regulate in order to contribute to improvements in governance. To do so, indeed, they need not be fully representative of those for whom they seek to speak out:

The value derived from NGOs is not that they are better representatives of public opinion than are

elected officials.... The true contribution of NGOs is that they seek to inform and influence the views of voters, elected officials and bureaucrats. (p.37)

This idea is elaborated further in Chapter 2. Enrique Peruzzotti explains that NGOs do not, and should not, be considered representational bodies within a democracy, but constituents of the democracy. They can sometimes be representative of members of this constituency, but the government, being elected by all, is the representative body. The arguments therefore made about NGOs not being representative or legitimate become meaningless. Equally, however, the concept of “downward accountability” loses its purpose, as according to Peruzzotti, accountability is defined as “the representatives” reporting back to those who have power over these representatives and have delegated their authority to them. This happens, for example, when government representatives are required to report back to the citizenry; it also happens when NGOs are required to report back to their boards, or members, or also, their donors. However, this does not happen between NGOs and their target group.

These two chapters clearly define “accountability” as a democratic concept, where NGOs are held accountable by their own members and boards, and also by public perception, with its powerful capacity of bequeathing credibility on an NGO – and taking it back if trust is breached. Chapter 7, however, then muddies the waters somewhat. Jem Bendell and Phyllida Cox attempt to unpack the accountability of donors to their beneficiaries, i.e., the downward accountability of donors. This they do by stating that this is an ideal expression of democratic accountability. However, the reader, having previously been thoroughly convinced by Charnovitz and Peruzzotti that democratic accountability means being accountable to those you represent, ends up wondering what it really is that “requires” donors to be accountable to their target group. In addition, while Chapters 1 and 2 clarified that accountability is always to those that have delegated authority, Chapter 7 now states: “Who is accountable? The person or group that affects some relatively less powerful person or group. To whom? To the person or group they are affecting” (p.115). The reader is left wondering who is right.... In addition, it is questionable if donors in general, but particularly official donors, would agree with the angle of Bendell and Cox on donor accountability.

The remainder of the book picks up on a much broader and more commonly held view of accountability, summarised by the

following definition (Chapter 11, p.196): “At its simplest, accountability refers to a process by which individuals or organisations are answerable for their actions and the consequences that follow from them”. This definition provides scope to analyse accountability to governments, to beneficiaries, and to the global arena. It does not try to answer the “to whom” and “how” questions, leaving room for innovative interpretations to these questions.

The case studies (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) on NGO accountability within national legal frameworks – Uganda, the Philippines, and the World Bank agenda – provide reference points for both institutional donors and NGO representatives attempting to influence the development of legislation on NGO regulation. The case studies of the Chinese and Indonesian contexts (Chapters 8 and 9) provide a clear, well-written overview of the historic and cultural dimensions of how NGOs are working, and are expected to work, in these countries. As is often the case with case studies, the learning out of them is quite specific to the context, and while they complete the picture, they do not mean to contribute to the debate on accountability itself.

The final section of the book develops a few examples of the sub-theme, self-regulation of the NGO sector. As seen from the view of Charnovitz and Peruzzotti, self-regulation is seen as a legitimate expectation from a sector which, effectively, should not be expected to be accountable to those they are trying to criticise. Hetty Kovach (Chapter 12) points out that self-regulation in the NGO sector has been a healthy complement to state regulation and institutional donor-driven reporting, and because of the NGO sector’s use of participatory development practices and a focus on learning from best practice, accountability to beneficiaries is arguably better amongst NGOs than amongst intergovernmental organisations or transnational corporations. The roll-out of Action Aid’s in-house accountability tool ALPS, which is focused on “downward accountability” is a good case study of innovation. The discussion of the strengths and role of the Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP), which led to the establishment of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP-I), explores some of the challenges of trying to establish self-regulation in an environment of emergency response while aiming to prioritise “the right of disaster-affected populations to raise complaints and concerns and the obligation placed on humanitarian actors to listen and respond to legitimate complaints” (p.193).

The last chapter, “On Trying to Do Good Well,” takes another look at legitimacy, especially for international NGOs which do not represent affected populations directly, in a best practice case study of how NGOs became involved in advocacy around building dams for electricity generation. It presents good reading for any policy and advocacy officer, highlighting potential pitfalls, and giving indications as to how to avoid them.

Alix Tiernan

UNDP Human Development Report 2006, Beyond Scarcity:

Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis

Gordonville Va/Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006

In November 2006 UNDP released this Report, *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*. The *2006 Human Development Report* analyses the root causes and effects of the current global water and sanitation crisis. As the world's spotlight fails to highlight the enormity of the global water crisis this Report provides crucial facts on the realities of the situation in the developing world:

- 1.1 billion people lack access to clean water
- 2.6 billion people lack access to sanitation facilities
- Every year more than two million children die of diarrhoea and other sicknesses caused by dirty water and lack of access to sanitation
- 443 million school days are lost each year due to water related diseases.

Statistics like these are littered throughout the *Human Development Report*, highlighting the reality of the water and sanitation crisis. *Beyond Scarcity* examines the current trends and the challenges now faced by governments globally. At the centre of this crisis are the politics of power, poverty and inequality. The majority of people without access to water and sanitation are poor, due largely to the fact that they have little or no power to influence the development agenda.

According to the Report responsibility for the crisis lies with governments of both rich and poor nations, which have failed to give water and sanitation the necessary recognition. While situations do vary from region to region, broadly speaking the two key problems recognised by the authors are:

- Water and sanitation are not considered a political priority;
- The poorest people pay the highest prices for water.

The *Human Development Report* also examines six sub-themes – the crisis in water and sanitation, water for human consumption, the sanitation deficit, water vulnerability and risk, water and agriculture and transboundary waters, each presenting findings of investigations and studies carried out on water and sanitation.

The Report analyses the socio-economic, environmental and institutional factors that affect the conflicting uses of water. It is claimed that inadequate access to water and sanitation are restricting poverty reduction initiatives and economic growth in the world's poorest countries. The worst affected regions are areas in sub-Saharan Africa where water infrastructure is limited and availability of water is poor.

The authors focus on how water and sanitation will profoundly influence the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and calls for annual investment of \$10 billion in order to achieve the MDGs. Although this price tag may seem high, when put in context “it represents less than the equivalent of five days’ global military spending and less than half the amount rich countries spend on mineral water each year”.

The Report recognises the benefits to be accrued if action is taken to reform water and sanitation, not only in improving health but economic benefits also:

- The economic rate of return for each \$1 invested in achieving the target for water and sanitation is \$8.
- The economic benefits of meeting the MDG targets would amount to \$38 billion, including \$15 billion in sub-Saharan Africa.
- There would be 203,000 fewer child deaths in 2015, and more than 1 million lives could be saved over the next decade.

However investment in water and sanitation also raises the debate regarding public versus private funds. Unlike policies advocated by the World Bank, the *Human Development Report* acknowledges the failure of privatisations in the developing world, yet highlights the importance of future investment in this area by the public and the private sector, the crucial factor being strong regulation and policies from governments.

In spite of predictions of water scarcity, the Report neglects to highlight the prospect of water wars. Yet, given the transboundary nature of water resources and the physical scarcity of water in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, this assertion is certainly debatable. Furthermore, with current inequalities in

the distribution of underground water resources, the assumption that wars could be fought over water seems credible.

Although the Report does touch on the effects of population growth, to a certain extent it fails to stress the impact that population growth will have on water scarcity. The author of *The World's Water*, Peter Gleick, claims that population growth is the single most important factor affecting water scarcity as the world's population is set to double over the next thirty years. And Charles Vorosmarty, research professor of global-scale hydrology, believes that the increase in demand for water will "outweigh greenhouse warming in defining the state of global water systems to 2025". Yet the Report remains optimistic in its view that there is enough water in the world for everyone and scarcity can be avoided if governments take adequate measures.

The Report proposes four steps to successfully avert a water and sanitation crisis. This four-point plan includes:

- Making water a human right (everyone should be entitled to at least 20 litres of water a day)
- Drawing up national strategies for water and sanitation (governments should spend a minimum of 1% of GDP on water)
- Supporting national plans with international aid (an extra US\$3-4 billion annually is needed)
- Developing a global action plan

The global action plan proposes further investment, building capacity, leveraging resources and measuring progress against the targets set.

This is not the first attempt by the UN to feature water and sanitation as a priority issue. In the 1980s it launched the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, yet the failure of this programme to meet the water needs of the world's population was blamed on rapid population growth in areas where services were not available. Population density is perhaps the biggest threat to water security at present and although the 2006 Report acknowledges population growth as a factor in achieving goals for water and sanitation, it fails to propose an adequate solution.

Fortunately this Report is not consumed by debates over public and private ownership of water resources. The focus instead lies in the practicalities that face access to water and sanitation and steps towards resolving the problems.

The reader should not be put off by the length of this Report, it is a fascinating read and provides a detailed insight into the current water and sanitation situation and future roads to be taken. Across much of the developing world access to unclean water is a considerably greater threat to human security than is violent conflict. *Beyond Scarcity* recognises this and attempts to challenge the political and institutional policies needed to reform unsustainable practices. Prioritising the poor in developing countries is central to the process of providing access to water and sanitation in a sustainable form. The authors' findings are certainly welcome and contributions from Kofi Annan, Gordon Brown, former President Jimmy Carter and President Lula reinforce the importance of prioritising water and sanitation. However, the Report fails to emphasise the issue of water scarcity and population growth, even though it is important that these factors are addressed.

What remains now, is for governments to take responsibility and adopt the measures outlined in the Report in order to ensure equitable and sustainable access to water and sanitation for all.

Deirdre McArdle