Preface

Issues relating to the supply of water and sanitation in peri-urban settings located in developing countries are of critical importance for public officials, scholars, and the citizens of the world given the large number of people affected and the impact of water and sanitation on the health and longevity of people living in these regions. Mathew Kurian and colleagues have written an excellent book that will be of great value not only for teaching students at various levels about the challenge of designing institutions and physical water systems, but also for policymakers facing tough decisions related to how they reduce unhealthy and fragile systems at a reasonable cost. It is easy to criticise the failure of many top-down decision processes – including funds and plans developed by international aid agencies. It is far more difficult to assess how to reform systems that are already in place and dependent on continued funding from either international aid agencies or national governments. It is tragic indeed that water supplies are generally more abundant now than half a century ago, but that marginalised groups and households living in megacities around the world still have little access to water supply and sewer networks in their everyday environments.

This volume contains excellent case studies from Africa, Asia and South America (as well as the Netherlands) that draw on a unifying framework for examining developmental and environmental challenges facing the people living in peri-urban settings. Because of the increase in the proportion of the population of the world moving from rural settings to urban areas, competition over obtaining sufficient water to provide safe water for urban residents has been increasing. Further, urban areas are now also increasing the volume of wastewater that generates higher pollution levels in both urban and rural settings as well as having a negative impact on the supply of water itself. Solving the positive feedback problems caused by changing population distributions, water demand and generation of wastewater has become ever more severe.

The authors of these chapters in this book draw on good theoretical foundations as well as generating carefully written case studies. They point to the need for institutional arrangements nested at multiple levels, which in some developing countries is particularly challenging to achieve. Modernisation for some policymakers has been equated with a strong national government and an active market for private goods. Overly simplistic reliance on idealised governmental and private
organisational arrangements can reduce the likelihood of grappling with real environmental problems at multiple scales. Matching the structure of governance arrangements to specific ecological conditions is pointed out by the authors to be more important than creating structures that are recommended in textbooks but do not fit the particular problems under consideration. Instead of following single blueprint solutions, the book re-enforces the need for innovative solutions involving a variety of organisational arrangements at multiple scales. Each of the studies provides excellent information about particular urban and peri-urban water problems and provides the reader with general lessons that can help in the design of new systems that build on knowledge of the particular biophysical and institutional foundation for creating better solutions.

Elinor Ostrom
Senior Research Director
Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis Indiana University
Founding Director, Center for the Study of Institutional Diversity,
Arizona State University
Peri-urban Water and Sanitation Services
Policy, Planning and Method
Kurian, M.; McCarney, P. (Eds.)
2010, XXXI, 300 p., Hardcover