EDITORIAL

Since around 1960, the speed, scale, scope and complexity of urban transformation processes of the developing world have become a formidable task to manage. It is now undoubtedly one of the most important challenges facing humankind. The urban population of the world never exceeded 7% until about 1800. The whole rural/urban dynamics was completely changed, especially in the developed word, by the Industrial revolution. At present, nearly 75% of the inhabitants in the Western world live in urban areas.

With advances in medical and health services, and as the life expectancies in the developing world started to increase during the post-1950 period, urbanisation process in developing countries accelerated and gained momentum. However, there is one fundamental difference between the urbanization process witnessed between developed and developing countries. The urban growth rates in developed countries were gradual, and thus there was time to plan and manage this growth. The economies of these countries were also growing as they were undergoing urbanisation. This ensured that financial resources were available to manage this incremental growth over a long period of time.

In contrast, the urban growth in developing countries has been very rapid. For example, the first megacity of the world, New York, had 150 years to plan and manage its urban population which increased by 8 million. In contrast, Mexico City witnessed doubling of the urban influx that New York had faced (16 million) but it had to manage this growth in only one-third of the time (50 years) New York had. Furthermore, Mexico City neither had the resources nor management capacity to manage this rapid urbanization.

With increasing globalization, acceleration of information and communication revolution and increasing chasms between the incomes and lifestyles of urban and rural population, next two decades are likely to witness major transformations in the urban centres of the developing world, and perhaps some urban-rural conflicts over development priorities.

China is a good example of the urbanization problems the developing world may face. At present, 40% of the Chinese workers are engaged in the agricultural sector but they account for only about 15 percent of the country's economic output. Unless the lifestyle of the rural Chinese can be improved significantly within about a decade or so, many Chinese from the rural areas are likely to migrate to urban areas looking for employments in industrial and service sectors. In fact, OECD has estimated that between 70 to 100 million rural workers are likely to migrate to urban areas between 2000 and 2010, looking for a better standard of living. If so, such massive rural-urban migration in about one decade in only one country will be unprecedented in human history.

Managing this rural exodus to urban areas in Asian countries like China and India, where urbanization has not been as advanced as in the Latin American region, will be a major challenge in the coming years. Provision of basic services like water, sanitation, education, health, housing, transportation, etc., will put accelerating pressure on the policy-makers to formulate and implement new and innovative policies which can ensure that poor people have reasonably decent standard of living.

In order to objectively and comprehensively discuss water management problems of major urban centres of the developing world, the Third World Centre for Water Management, the Water Resources Laboratory of the Helsinki University of Technology and Stockholm International Water Institute organised a seminar in Stockholm. All the papers for this volume, except the one on Singapore, were specially commissioned from leading water experts of the region. These papers were then discussed in depth during this Seminar, and the authors then revised their papers in the light of the comments received at Stockholm. The

paper on Singapore is a much-expanded version of the one than was prepared for the 2006 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme. Together, all these contributions provide an overall picture of the current situations and future prospects for water management as a whole for major urban centres of the developing world.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Water Resources Laboratory of the Helsinki University of Technology for providing intellectual and financial support to this activity, and to Stockholm International Water Institute for the technical and organization support that we received for the Seminar.

Dr. Olli Varis of Helsinki University of Technology, Prof. Jan Lundqvist on behalf of the Stockholm International Water Institute, and Dr. Cecilia Tortajada from the Third World Centre for Water Management, were instrumental for the organisation of the Seminar, and the subsequent editing of the papers. We are most grateful to these three internationally well-known water personalities for their support which made both the Seminar and this volume possible.

Asit K. Biswas, President
Third World Centre for Water Management
Atizapan, Mexico