

Hotten, A.; Stein, S.; Harris, A.-M.; Stevens, A.G.T.; Hillis, D.G.; Nickisch, B. and Berry, K.A. 2014. Book review of Lankford et al. 2013. Water security: Principles, perspectives, and practices. Water Alternatives 7(2): 439-441

WaA

---

## BOOK REVIEW

**Lankford, B.; Bakker, K.; Zeitoun, M. and Conway, D. (Eds). 2013. Water Security: Principles, Perspectives, and Practices.** London: Earthscan. ISBN: 978-0-415-53470-3 (hbk), \$160.00; 978-0-53471-0 (pbk), \$57.95; 978-0-203-11320-2 (ebk), 376 pp.

(URL: [www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415534710/](http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415534710/))

**Alison Hotten, Sam Stein, Ann Marie Harris, Angela D.T. Stevens, Alexandra Masaitis, David G. Hillis and Brian Nickisch<sup>1</sup>**

Department of Geography, University of Nevada, Reno, USA; [alison.hotten@gmail.com](mailto:alison.hotten@gmail.com)

**Kate A. Berry**

Department of Geography, University of Nevada, Reno, USA; [kberry@unr.edu](mailto:kberry@unr.edu)

---

What do ecosystems, national sovereignty, and social justice have in common? They are all aspects of water security – a concept that has been gaining popularity in recent years, despite a lack of consensus on its definition and the concepts it entails. The key components of the definition are generally quantity, quality, and safety from hazards, for all users and uses. However, when it comes to governance and the real-world application of water security tenets, far more is implicitly involved. *Water Security: Principles, Perspectives and Practices* marks a significant contribution to literature on water security by examining this evolving and multifaceted concept.

The interconnectedness of themes within the book highlights the complexity of water security issues, while the variety of contexts stresses the challenges of applying a narrow definition of water security. As the reader is instructed in the introductory chapter "Refrain from seeking a singular definition of water security", the term cannot be precisely condensed into a "single snappy definition" (p. 9). This book is not a comprehensive guide to all aspects of the water security debate nor practically speaking could it be. Rather, it serves as an overview covering a diverse range of issues that falls under the umbrella of water security. Its interdisciplinary nature is clear: a total of twenty-seven contributors represent a wide range of backgrounds and a variety of perspectives.

As the editors state in the introduction, the purpose of the book is not to provide solutions to water security problems or decipher the question 'water security how?' The strongly conceptual focus of the book may frustrate some readers because the discussion on future trajectories and implementation is limited. That said, there are many authors using the term water security but few discuss the concept itself in such depth or as systematically.

The book is persuasive in showing the value of taking a step back to build the theoretical framework for future research. That is much of its significance. It provides a much-needed overview of water security, as well as building a framework to begin working toward future solutions. The authors also

---

<sup>1</sup> This review is the fruit of a collaborative effort by 7 students of the graduate-level course on Water Security at the University of Reno, Nevada. The email of the corresponding author, Alison Hotten, is provided.

address potential consequences of water security, such as the ramifications of securitisation rhetoric. For example, Christina Leb and Patricia Wouters discuss the paradox of securitisation acting as an obstacle to achieving water security (chapter 3). When linked to national security, water security can promote isolationist policies with respect to shared water resources, which may ultimately lead to water insecurity. Therein lies the paradox: "cooperation and not securitisation is at the heart of achieving effective water security" (p. 41).

Water security is a concept that has been enthusiastically embraced by some in governments and the press. As Rutgerd Boelens puts it in chapter 15, it is often idealised "as if water security mostly refers to win-win situations in which all will benefit equally" (p. 240). A number of the chapters address the important question 'water security for who?' raised in the introduction (p. 9). What constitutes water security may vary at different scales, from national governments, cities, ecosystems, corporations, down to the household level (chapters 11, 7, 9, 14, and 19, respectively). In some cases, the water needs or agendas of these different actors may be incompatible. The book raises questions concerning power asymmetries and ethics in the prioritisation of certain users and uses in the event of competition.

Chapters include competing viewpoints and at times the authors even critically examine the value and validity of the concept of water security itself, for example in chapter 10 by Floriane Clément. Following the rhetoric of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), water productivity, sustainability, and water governance, Clément asks what does 'water security' have to offer? Does it represent a paradigm shift, or is it merely a buzzword? One criticism of the book falls along similar lines: several chapters seem only tangentially related to the central issue of water security. It begs the question of whether the authors are contributing to the understanding of water security, or if they are merely reframing ideas under a new label. Taken as a whole, however, the book makes it clear that there is value in recognising water security as an emerging concept, going beyond some earlier conceptions about water by recognising that water resources are interconnected with a variety of social and physical processes. The contributions develop a fuller understanding of these linkages to provide a more sophisticated means of addressing water issues and understanding social actions.

Chapters by Mark Zeitoun and Bruce Lankford provide useful visual models and conceptual frameworks for understanding and explaining water security issues (chapter 2 and 21, respectively). Zeitoun's 'web' of national water security discusses the interdependency of issues including human security, climate security, food security, energy security, and national security. Security for each is necessary to obtain sustainable water security, but Zeitoun notes that "unacknowledged weaknesses in biophysical science and a lack of engagement with social science" (p. 20) act as barriers to research and efficacious policy. Lankford closes the book with a synthesis chapter proposing a second model, the *incodys* model, as a tool that can be employed in a decision-making process and used to guide dialogue. Water policy that fails to incorporate essential factors is potentially insecure, as is one that fails to account for future uncertainties like climate change and demographic shifts. In this sense, Zeitoun's and Lankford's models for water security are valuable for developing proactive adaptation strategies, taking action in anticipation of future change, as opposed to reactive, crisis-driven adaptation (Hurd, 2012).

The book *Water Security* is geared toward professionals, policy-makers, students, and academics, but may be more beneficial to the latter two insofar as it serves as a springboard for further discussion and a theoretical basis for future research. Most of the chapters cover important topics, but not all are of equal merit when it comes to advancing our understanding of water security. Despite a few limitations, the editors successfully walk the line between "oversimplification and overcomplication" (p. 338) and, as such, it serves as a significant text that untangles many of the issues surrounding water security and underscores the growing significance of this concept. The variety of perspectives creates a greater awareness about significant factors surrounding water security.

**REFERENCES**

Hurd, B. 2012. Climate vulnerability and adaptive strategies along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo border of Mexico and the United States. *Journal of Contemporary Water Research & Education* 149: 56-63.

---

THIS ARTICLE IS DISTRIBUTED UNDER THE TERMS OF THE CREATIVE COMMONS *ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERCIAL-SHAREALIKE* LICENSE WHICH PERMITS ANY NON COMMERCIAL USE, DISTRIBUTION, AND REPRODUCTION IN ANY MEDIUM, PROVIDED THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR(S) AND SOURCE ARE CREDITED. SEE [HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY-NC-SA/3.0/LEGALCODE](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/legalcode)

---