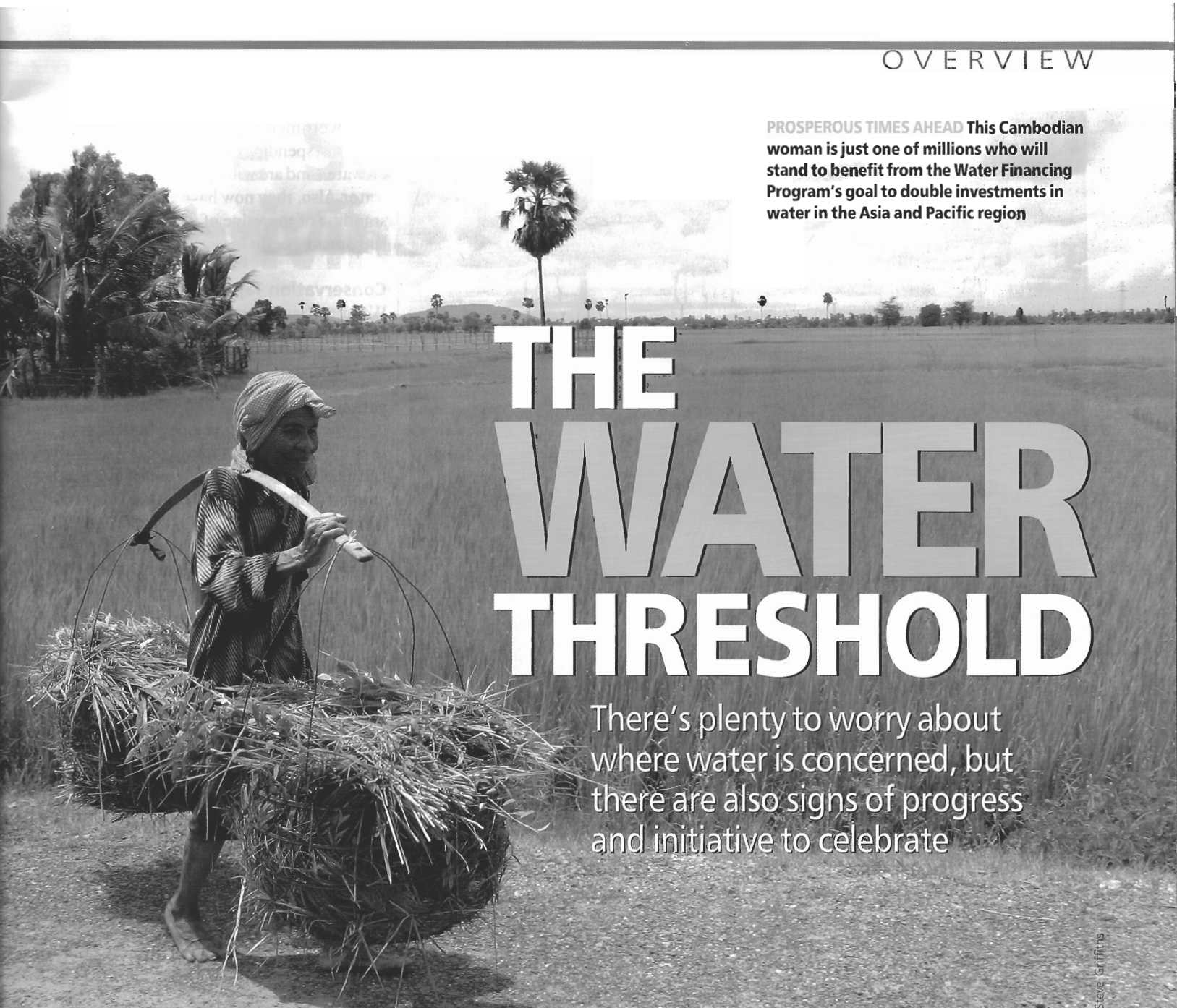


PROSPEROUS TIMES AHEAD This Cambodian woman is just one of millions who will stand to benefit from the Water Financing Program's goal to double investments in water in the Asia and Pacific region



THE WATER THRESHOLD

There's plenty to worry about where water is concerned, but there are also signs of progress and initiative to celebrate

By Melissa Howell Alipalo

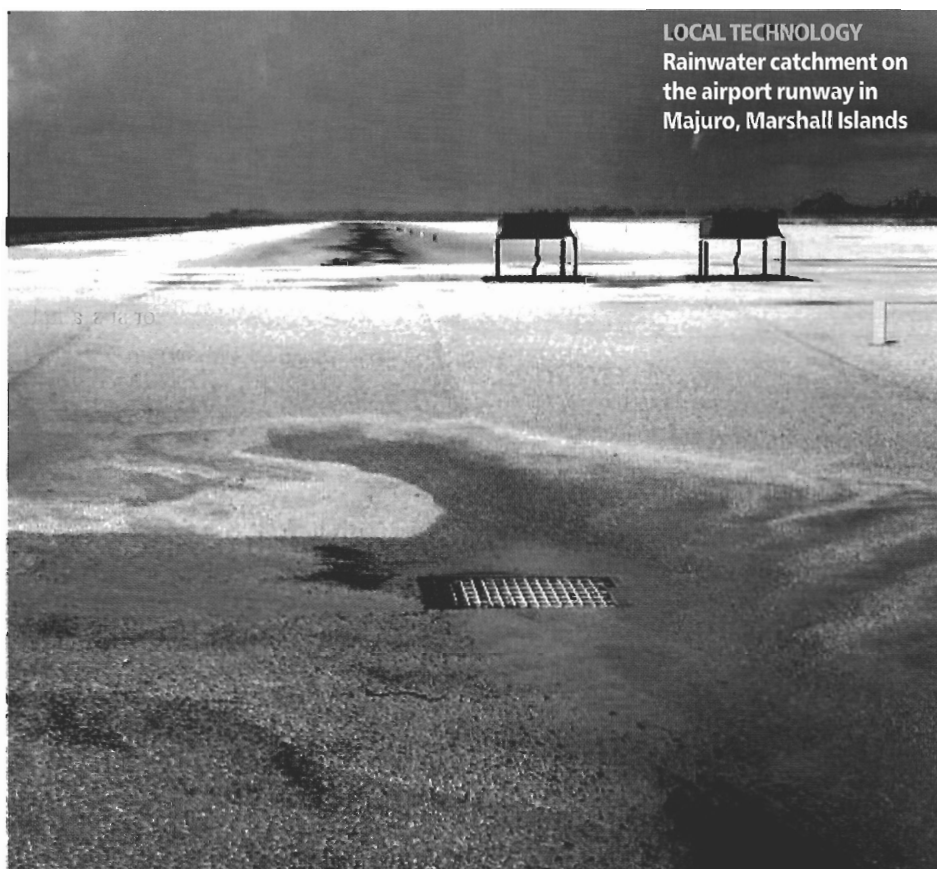
Communications Specialist and Writer for Cooperation Fund for the Water Sector

Water is big news. Rarely does a day pass when a water issue is not featured prominently in the media. It is news when water supply projects come to town, when chemicals contaminate drinking water, when floods wash away lives and livelihoods, and when economies show signs of stagnation because of diminishing water resources.

And it is news when industries and commerce are forced to look elsewhere for their water needs.

Less prominent are the everyday stories of the silent masses without access to safe water supply. The figures are staggering: one in five people in Asia and the Pacific lacks access to safe drinking water. Half the region's population lacks access to sanitation.

Steve Griffiths



LOCAL TECHNOLOGY
Rainwater catchment on
the airport runway in
Majuro, Marshall Islands

ADB Photo Library

Governments in the region are showing the willingness and the commitment to face the water challenge head on. However, the success stories remain outweighed by the challenges that still exist

Of the 2.6 billion people worldwide without adequate sanitation, 2 billion live in the Asia and Pacific region. People suffering from easily preventable waterborne diseases take up half the world's hospital beds. Each year, waterborne diseases, which are often easily treatable, kill more people than HIV/AIDS and malaria combined. Each year, five times more children die from waterborne diseases than from HIV/AIDS. Yet, a simple standpipe can reduce mortality from waterborne diseases by 20%.

Patchy Support

Despite the news stories and the resulting increasing public awareness of water issues, international economic support for water

projects has been patchy. And money spent on water does not always result in improving the access or quality of water for the poor, researchers say.

The most desperate countries—where less than 60% of the people have access to improved water sources—receive the smallest amount of project funds and water aid: about 12%.

Widespread criticism of governments' and decision makers' failure to act on the current water situation abounds. The term "water apartheid" has emerged to describe the inadequacies and unfairness of the way in which water issues have been managed by decision makers, but the question remains: why aren't those in a position to do more to improve the access and quality of water to all people not acting at all, or not acting fast enough?

However, some governments, in recognizing the dismal state of their water, are working to improve old water systems and build new infrastructure. They are legislating to protect water resources, seeking to ensure the poor are guaranteed services and rights over water resources, and are investing in new areas—such as enhancing the capacity of local government, utilities, and communities to deal with water issues.

Governments are seeking innovative solutions, spending more of their own money on water, and are willing to borrow more for water. Also, they now have a better understanding of the value of partnerships with the private sector in water issues.

Conservation Taps Technology

Water technology has developed with conservation in mind. For example, a standard flush toilet today consumes six times less water than it did 10 years ago. Drip irrigation—widely used and shown to help conserve water in developed countries—is being used increasingly across Asia and the Pacific, and helping reduce poverty among farmers who lack access to irrigated land.

Governments in the region are showing the willingness and the commitment to face the water challenge head on. However, the success stories remain outweighed by the challenges that still exist.

And that is what this special issue of *ADB Review* is about: acknowledging the challenges that face the region in its quest to provide safe and reliable water resources to all people, and especially the poor, and recognizing the bold and ambitious initiatives already underway and those planned to help change the water status quo.

We examine ADB's new Water Financing Program 2006–2010, which is a commitment to more than double investments in water in the region over the next 4 years, and the Water Financing Partnership Facility, which aims to raise \$100 million in grants that will support governments willing to take on reforms and develop skills within their institutions, utilities, and communities.

And we ask ADB water operations staff for their views about the barriers and opportunities that exist in some of the region's fastest-growing economies—the People's Republic of China, India, Pakistan, and Viet Nam, as well as in the slower yet hopeful economies of Indonesia and Philippines.

Through this issue of *ADB Review*, readers will gain a greater understanding of the many factors contributing to Asia's water woes and the streams of action ADB, governments, and the communities need to undertake to help preserve, and achieve equitable access to, our most precious natural resource: water. ■