

Building a Lasting Water Community

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This year's 10th World Water Forum (10WWF), with the theme "Water for Shared Prosperity," highlighted the need to identify and promote the collective values of water, along with heritage structures and practices. I was invited to give an opening speech at the official side event (SE37) of the UNESCO Chair Water, Ports and Historic Cities titled "Promoting the Values of the Subak System for Sustainable Water and Heritage Management."

My office at the ministry has the tasks of formulating and implementing policies on water resource management, drinking water systems, wastewater and solid waste management, environmental drainage, and housing provision and development. Our role is complex in that housing depends on water supply as much as road construction depends on stormwater drainage. At a time when freshwater supplies and quality are diminishing for many reasons, including urbanization pressure, environmental degradation and pollution, we recognize that age-old traditional water infrastructure can offer inspiration for the design of contemporary hydrological systems. It can also be preserved as a model of ancestral ingenuity.

The work on the Balinese Subak water management between my ministry and institutions such as Indonesia's Ministry of Culture and Udayanas University's Subak Laboratorium provides the foundation for long overdue collaboration across sectors, technologies and borders. The Subak is an irrigation system that combines artistry and technical ingenuity. It is also a communal institution for the collective work of rice farmers using a shared irrigation system on land fed by the same water source. This cultural heritage of the Subak, which holds significant local wisdom, has endured for centuries due to its principle of community engagement, even in the technical sector of water supply. Subak transcends mere agricultural management. It embodies a holistic philosophy of harmonious coexistence between God, nature and fellow beings.

The successful preservation of this multiscalar system demonstrates the importance of the communal collaboration required for its development and maintenance. Although problems occur even amid solutions, the joint effort at different levels, from local and regional to national, contributes to the Subak's resilience and adaptability. Also, the spirit of "Gotong Royong" or mutual cooperation, which is imbued in Balinese society, permeates social obligations and religious practices. From agricultural endeavors to communal rituals, cooperation is not merely a virtue, but a way of life, binding communities together in collaboration. The Subak system's sustainability is underpinned by a guarantee of land ownership rights. According to Bali's traditional land laws, those who cultivate untamed lands inherit the rights to steward them for generations, alongside obligations to contribute toward communal resources through financial sharing.

Preface

By harnessing the wisdom embedded in water heritage, we can chart a course toward a future where water is not merely a commodity, but a source of shared prosperity and harmony. The discussions presented in *Blue Papers* address current challenges by bolstering concepts, strategies, new approaches and methodologies aimed at ensuring the sustainability of water use. The editors have proven their commitment to advancing dialogue, knowledge exchange and dissemination, and interdisciplinary collaboration in the pursuit of bridging the water-culture-heritage nexus, which aims at achieving water security and inclusive prosperity. I endorse the journal and support the team of the UNESCO Chair Water, Ports and Historic Cities in their activities in the coming years. I invite more publications and articles that show the complexity of the Subak's past and its contemporary relevance, both of which have profound implications for water governance, cultural preservation and sustainable development and can serve as a global example.