

IMPLICATIONS OF WATER RESOURCE EXPERIENCE

Governmental performance in providing for urban water supply and sewage disposal illustrates a number of significant obstacles that result from the organization of government and the allocation of public responsibilities in metropolitan areas. Local approaches, particularly in the suburbs and in the case of waste disposal, have clearly been inadequate. The availability of significant economies of scale when large water and sewage systems are developed, as well as the frequent desirability of tapping distant sources of water or taking advantage of large natural drainage basins, have prompted many communities to attempt broader solutions to their problems. Many alternatives have been used, ranging from joint undertakings with neighboring communities to contracting with central cities or establishing metropolitan water and sewage districts. Other inherent weaknesses of a local approach have also become evident. **Spillover** effects, in which inadequate sewage treatment pollutes water for downstream users, have often led to local irresponsibility in the absence of broader governmental approaches. With the growth of vast metropolitan regions and the rise of many conflicting interests among water users, State concern for water resource development and management has increased. Finally, the Federal Government has also emerged in a critical role both in stimulating more adequate local investment and taking a hand in controlling water pollution.

Similar issues emerge from a consideration of other government functions in urban areas. The pattern of local government has many inadequacies for performing urban functions, but many kinds of corrective action are possible. Aside from more comprehensive planning and sharing of local undertakings, the resources of States and the Federal Government need to be brought to bear on urban problems such as water supply and sewage disposal. Specific recommendations for improved performance of water and sewage responsibilities are presented in chapter VII, pages 141-148, within the context of the Commission's overall program for strengthening governmental capabilities to deal with urban problems. Before opening an exploration of governmental reform, however, it is useful to consider a somewhat different type of governmental responsibility—relocation assistance—which is the subject of the following chapter.