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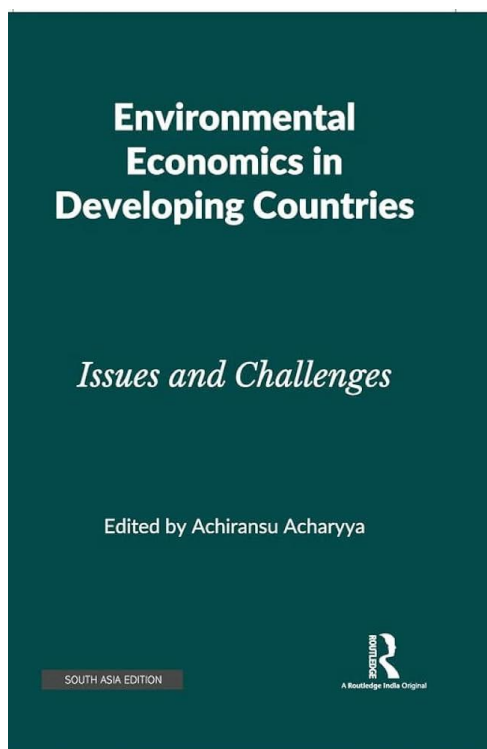
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BOOK REVIEW

Reconciling Ecological Sustainability and Economic Development in Developing Countries

Nandan Nawn*

Achiransu Acharyya, ed. 2023. *Environmental Economics in Developing Countries: Issues and Challenges*. First South Asia edition, Abingdon, Oxon, and New York, NY: Routledge.



The volume titled *Environmental Economics in Developing Countries: Issues and Challenges* in honour of Rabindranath Bhattacharya, edited by Achiransu Acharyya, is an expansive and comprehensive collection of theoretical and applied works on the subject. Besides a foreword by Partha Dasgupta, it carries 15 essays by 32 authors as well as an introduction and an overview by the editor. The diverse geographical backgrounds of the authors—Bhutan, Canada, France, India, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Spain, the UK, and the USA—serve as recognition of the contributions of the honouree. RNB, or Rabin-da as he was popularly known, started teaching natural

* Professor, Department of Economics, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi 110025, India.
nnletter@gmail.com

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resource economics in 1987 at North Bengal University, which is located at the foothills of the eastern Himalayas in West Bengal, India.

The collection covers multiple aspects of the theory–practice–policy continuum of both environmental and natural resource economics, with a focus on a few developing countries. It is well-known that the intertwining of people and nature in these spaces poses additional challenges in finding pathways for economic development that are least pollution intensive as well as ecologically most benign. Since most people depend on natural resources for their livelihoods in these nations, these countries must partake in certain trade-offs involving ecological sustainability and economic development, which are amply covered in the Foreword and the Introduction.

One of this book's positive attributes is its inclusivity; it has something for everyone interested in the subject, across various levels of knowledge and skills. Young researchers may learn how to write a literature survey from “Electrification and Development: Empirical Evidence on the Effect of Electricity Provision on Household Welfare” (Ch. 4) or “Regional Climate Vulnerabilities in South Asia: A Development Perspective” (Ch. 9). Experienced researchers may gain insights on the use of sophisticated econometric techniques from “Incentives for Rural Households to Establish Tree Cover on Agricultural Land in Andhra Pradesh, India” (Ch. 7) or “Minimizing Ecological Damage from Road Improvement in Tropical Forests” (Ch. 8). Similarly, early-career authors can gain insights on how to write a case study from “Household Waste Management and the Role of Gender in Nepal” (Ch. 13) and “Fabricated Electric Fencing: A Promising Strategy for Reducing Crop Damages from Wildlife in Bhutan” (Ch. 14). Additionally, teachers of natural resource economics will likely find it useful to include “Forests, Carbon Sequestration, and Ecosystem Services” (Chapter 6) in their reading lists as it extends Faustmann's classic “rotation model” by considering the trade-off between carbon sequestration during growing periods and other ecosystem services provided by forests once they are fully grown. “Three Theories of Growth, Environment and Poverty Nexus” (Ch. 1) expands our frontiers of knowledge by questioning the applicability of theories predicting a vicious cycle or downward spiral of environmental degradation and an increase in poverty. It questions the commonly cited trade-off between environmental improvement and income growth due to the “presence of institutions and policies securing environmental endowments and entitlements to the poor” (p. 47) in developing countries. This theoretical approach, which is based on effective institutional structures and processes, is complemented using a practice-oriented lens in “Incentive-based Approaches to Nature Conservation”

(Ch. 5). The institutional question is addressed at a broader level in “Environmental Policy in India: Retrospect and Recent Developments” (Ch. 12). “Climate-Smart Agriculture in Developing Economies: An Analysis of Strategies and Policies” (Ch. 10) covers matters connected with agriculture in developing economies as such but with a focus on South and Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa

As expected, COVID-19 appears in multiple chapters. The interconnectedness between economic development, COVID-19, and the depletion of natural capital including biodiversity is thoroughly covered by two complementary chapters, “Natural Capital, Pandemic and Development: Exploration of Nexus and Solutions” (Ch. 2) and “COVID-19: A Neo-Malthusian Event—Ecological Links, Challenges, and Opportunities” (Ch. 3). The former has a wider range, covering many developing countries, while the latter is focused on India. “Pandemic, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development” (Ch. 11) addresses the same interconnectedness but in a reflective style.

“Revisiting the Regional Environmental Economics Networks” (Ch. 15) is unique to the volume. It offers rarely known insights on processes at the level of funding agencies to analyse “the effectiveness of the capacity-building model used by [Regional Environmental Economics] [...] networks in creating locally relevant [...] knowledge and their capacity for fostering knowledge dissemination and intake by policymakers for change” [p. 334]. The six lessons (pp. 350–53) “learned and challenges that have been faced” in the process are a must read for anyone interested in building regional networks as such, and not just in environmental economics. It may be pertinent to highlight that the authors of this volume were or are connected with either the Indian Society for Ecological Economics (INSEE) or the South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE) or both. The honouree was associated with both.¹

¹ RNB served as a resource person in “Research and Training Workshops” organised by SANDEE for many years. The author of this review attended one such workshop in 2010 at the Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand. RNB was a member of the sub-committee set up by the executive committee (EC) of INSEE in its 29th Meeting (November 30, 2012; GIDR, Ahmedabad, Gujrat)—comprising four EC members and chaired by Kanchan Chopra—to assess the viability of an “INSEE Journal”. EC in its subsequent meetings reflected on the report of the sub-committee and placed it before the general body (GB). In its annual meeting (December 5, 2013; Tezpur University Auditorium, Tezpur, Assam) the GB “in principle resolved to approve the proposal of the EC to start a journal” and “empowered the EC to work out the modalities and start the journal at the earliest” (Source: Various minutes of EC and GB meetings).

There is some scope for improvement in both copy-editing and typesetting. A few illustrations of the same follow: (a) Ch. 9 used both in-text citations as well as citations in footnotes—unusual for any citation style; (b) p. 226 refers to (Toi 2009), which should have been (Tol 2009); (c) Ch. 6 includes an in-text citation (The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review 2021. Dasgupta 2021) on p. 90 with a corresponding entry in the bibliography (p. 107)—both are incorrectly typed; (d) a third-level section heading is missing on p. 289. All of these could have been avoided with a little more care.

Ordinarily, a Festschrift covers works of the honouree—even if only a bird’s eye view—as a part of the introduction. This would have connected the honouree with more “students”, something he cherished throughout his life, inside the classroom as well as outside. But apart from the omissions and commissions mentioned in this and the previous paragraph, this book is an appropriate homage to one of the pioneering teachers of economics of nature in India.

Conflict of Interest Statement: There is no conflict of interest, besides the ones mentioned in footnote in the previous page.