9-14-2011

Global Environmental Change and Human Security – Edited by Richard A. Matthew, Jon Barnett, Bryan McDonald, and Karen L. O'Brien

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Recommended Citation

Global Environmental Change and Human Security
Richard A. Matthew, Jon Barnett, Bryan McDonald, and Karen L. O'Brien, eds.
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (2010)

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　　Environmental security is no longer a fringe field. It is a research domain "effectively established," as the editors of this volume admit. (307) So it's time to stop turning out these same vague and overly theoretical "concept" books, and get cracking on how to actually solve some of the interrelated problems of global environmental change and human security. The Global Environmental Change and Human Security project (GECHS) was a groundbreaking endeavor when it began in 1996, and many of the GECHS founders have contributed chapters to this volume. Now, however, the theoretical and practical connections between environmental drivers and human security outcomes are both commonsensical and demonstrated, and it's time to move from theory to praxis.

　　This edited volume is broken up into sections, each addressing the various effects of global environmental change on human (in)security, conflict and cooperation, and sustainable development, respectively. In the first section (section II, the Introduction being section I), Mike Brklacich points out that past research on natural hazards and famine has shown that all human systems are vulnerable as a fundamental characteristic. External environmental shocks expose this vulnerability, they do not cause it. Consequently, he defines human security as a society's capacity to overcome vulnerability, and he recommends that global environmental change research needs to start from vulnerability assessments rather than threat assessments as a "precautionary approach." (48) As a general principle, this is sound, but as observers of the global climate regime know, paying now to avoid costs in the future is rarely an actionable policy frame in today's political climate.

　　In his chapter on human security and global health (one of the best in the book), Bryan McDonald points out that baseline improvements to national public health infrastructure provide both human and national security gains that far outweigh their costs. Laura Little & Chris Cocklin point out that much research in the area of global environmental change is too broad-grained to improve human security – hence their focus on housing and the vulnerability of urban slum dwellers. However, I wonder if the reverse is true: would more fine-grained research translate into better policies to ensure human security? The chapter ends with no recommendations to ameliorate the plight of urban slum dwellers nor any specific examples of how global environmental change reveals their vulnerabilities, but an exhortation to extend the causal chain of vulnerability back to its "root causes."(91) Victoria Basolo concludes with an interesting and informative examination of post-Katrina New Orleans from a human security perspective.

　　The second section addresses global environmental change and the risk of violent conflict, and this is where the chapters become a frustrating retread of previously-done work. Jon Barnett and Neil Adger's thesis that environmental change causes human

insecurity by reducing access to, or quality of, natural resources that populations need to sustain their livelihoods (119) is no longer the heretical proposition it once was. Richard Matthew and Bishnu Raj Upreti claim that environmental stress and population factors played a significant role in Nepal's recent upheaval, yet other than recommending that Nepalis "cultivate new livelihoods," (150), they provide no ideas as to how this might occur, a striking omission, since Pakistan with over six times the population looms nearby as Nepal writ large or worse.

The third section relates global environmental change to the various facets of sustainable development. In their chapter on equity, Karen O'Brien and Robin Leichenko point out that the emphasis on North-South inequities pulls focus from other equity issues critical to human security, such as gender and economic discrepancies. In addition, "binary" frames like North vs. South become increasingly inaccurate as human security problems become more complex. (169) Equity resonates with humans in an immediate way that gradual environmental change does not, and the climate change issue in particular might see some action at the international level if framed with an equity focus. Heather Goldsworthy examines the particular vulnerabilities of women to global environmental change, and Indra de Soysa, Jennifer Bailey, and Eric Neumeyer tie democratic policymaking to the prospect of sustainable economic development. The volume also includes contributions from Marvin Soroos, Betsy Hartmann, Kwasi Nsiah-Gyabaah, and Alexander Lopez.

I must disagree with Geoff Dabelko's foreword comment that these topics remain highly contested. Nothing in this volume is seriously contested. Many academic studies of the sort published by MIT Press are theoretical in nature; their target audience, presumably, is other academics. The obligatory 2x2 table makes its appearance in several of the chapters, (see Drezner, *International Politics and Zombies*, 32) as does the over-generalized flow chart. However, the time has come to move beyond "suggestions for future research." The gap in the field of environmental security is not in the academic theory; it is not even in the case studies. Rather, the gap is how to translate the cross-field linkages inherent in the concept of environmental and human security into actionable policy at the national level. If that gap is not addressed, if those engaged in theory-building continue to stay in their comfort zone, this exact same volume will still be prophetic in fifty years, because none of the actionable issues addressed herein will have been acted upon.