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Peer reviewed

Review: Global Environmental Change and Human Security
By Matthew, Richard A., Barnett, Jon, McDonald, Bryan and L. O'Brien, Karen (Eds.)

Reviewed by Jan Kunnas
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Matthew, Richard A., Barnett, Jon, McDonald, Bryan and L. O'Brien, Karen (Eds.).
Global Environmental Change and Human Security. Cambridge, Massachusetts &
London, England. The MIT Press, 2010. 328 pp. ISBN 978-0-262-51308-1. paperback
alk. paper US \$25.00/£18.95.

This book is not for those who want easy answers to the relationship between global environmental change and human security. We can though also ask ourselves whether such answers even exists, when already global environmental change refers not only to climate change, but also to several other interconnected issues such as biodiversity loss, destruction of stratospheric ozone layer, depletion of freshwater sources, impairment of food-producing ecosystems and worldwide dissemination of various chemicals and heavy metals. Human security again is defined: "...as something that is achieved when and where individuals and communities have the options necessary to end, mitigate, or adapt to threats to their human, environmental, and social rights; have the capacity and freedom to exercise these options; and actively participate in pursuing these options" (p. 18).

For those with patience enough this book gives a detailed examination of the complex social, health, and economic consequences of environmental change across the globe. In the introductory chapter the editors of the book trace the evolution of recent thinking about the relationship between people, the environment and security towards an increasing recognition that there are a wider range of risks to the sovereign integrity of the state than just that of military invasion. In the following fourteen chapters the consequences of environmental change are examined at different scales and in different places from the vulnerability of urban dwellers to the decade-long Nepalese civil war and from a case study of Hurricane Katrina to the relationship between sustainable economic development and democracy.

We learn the importance of preventive measures as opposed to reactive efforts in wide ranging issues like human health and global environmental problems like climate change. We receive a call for a move beyond the north-south divide as "...the local and regional inequities related to climate change impacts and adaption are not exclusive to developing countries" (p. 166). Furthermore mischaracterizing population growth as a danger to northern security might justify misguided and in some cases counterproductive policy responses: "...when the developed countries perceive the developing world to be a site of future wars fought over scarce resources, that perception most likely leads to security responses that increase the likelihood of war" (p. 311).

Indeed the book goes beyond alarmist visions to present several solutions to the issues raised. It provides an inspiring example by showing how the management of the La Plata River Basin shared by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay have built cooperation and contributed to peace. Among the solutions is the empowerment of women as environmental managers which requires eliminating the construction of women as helpless victims during times of crisis. On a

general level it calls for a shift from "... the present approach of emphasizing the causes of insecurity, to balancing this with identification of the strengths and capabilities of individuals and communities" (p. 314).

The book ends with several suggestions for further research ranging from changing gender roles and identity to the role that values, beliefs, and worldviews play in determining impacts and responses to environmental change making it an essential need for scholars looking for good research questions. It would also make a good text book for courses dealing with human rights, human security or environmental change if the lecturer is not afraid of challenging his students.

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