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Review: Air Pollution & Health in Rapidly Developing Countries

By Gordon McGranahan and Frank Murray (Eds)

Reviewed by [Scott Bucher](#)

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Gordon McGranahan, & Frank Murray (Eds.). *Air Pollution & Health in Rapidly Developing Countries*. Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2003. 227 pp. ISBN 1-85383-985-X (paper). US\$32.50

Appealing to both policy-makers and researchers alike, *Air Pollution & Health* provides a selection of eleven articles exploring the nature, effects, causes, and means of alleviating air pollution within rapidly developing countries, focusing particularly on information and methods to aid air pollution management. The scope of the articles varies widely from global and regional to state and city analyses, providing a broad context complemented by specific case studies. An effective thematic balance is similarly achieved and many dimensions and forms of air pollution are examined. For example, "Air Pollution and Health – Studies in the Americas and Europe" (pp. 35-46) provides an epidemiological overview of illnesses caused by specific pollutants, while two other articles specifically address the impact of pollution and responses on behalf of government and industry within Hong Kong and Santiago. In such a manner, several key themes integrate a broad range of information.

The most dominant of these themes is that, while air pollution problems of developed and developing countries may be similar in some respects, a number of differences make pure extrapolation of the experiences of developed countries to developing countries rather limited. Such differences may involve the chemical composition and concentration of pollution as well as different responses among populations caused by such factors as healthcare and nutrition. The article "Indoor Air Pollution" provides a vivid example of such differences. The authors state that indoor air pollution caused by the use of traditional cooking fuels such as dung, crop residues, and wood, contributes to a range of health problems such as acute respiratory infection, pulmonary disease, cancer, blindness, tuberculosis, and adverse pregnancy outcomes. Moreover, it may be "one of the largest single risk factors for mortality – roughly 6 per cent globally" (p. 129).

Unfortunately, due to the dearth of studies conducted within developing countries, one currently may have little choice but to rely largely upon the research of developed countries. The editors call attention to the need for increased research and collaboration among developing countries to establish a body of knowledge that will best equip them to meet their

particular needs. They note also that greater sensitivity to differences and similarities of communities would allow researchers more fruitfully to draw upon the examples of others.

Perhaps the greatest strength of *Air Pollution & Health* is that it is consistently geared toward practitioners without compromising scientific rigor. This holds true for each article as well as the book as a whole. "Rapid Assessment of Air Pollution and Health" is illustrative in this respect. While rapid assessments have become relatively popular among development professionals, what constitutes an effective rapid assessment or appraisal is rather vague. In contrast, this article provides a well-documented account of the merits and limitations of different assessment techniques given various resource constraints.

Overall, *Air Pollution & Health* provides a valuable contribution to efforts to control air pollution within the developing world by providing a wide range of empirically grounded analysis rich with nuanced findings and well-supported recommendations for more economically and environmentally sound policies, while also providing guidance for additional research.

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