

Review - Poverty Reduction in a Changing Climate

Written by Alex Stark

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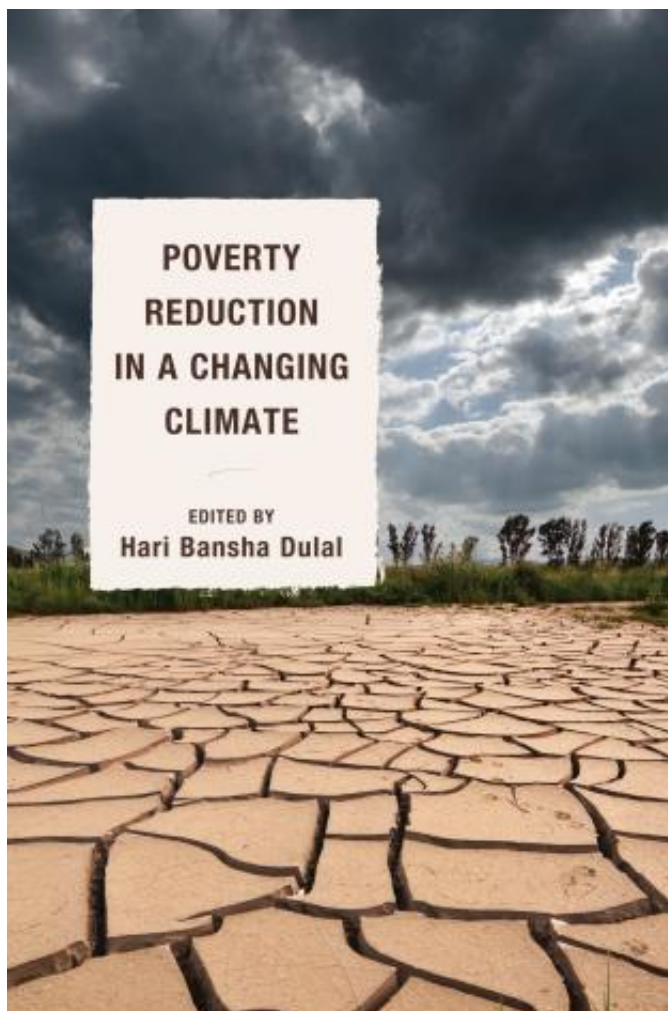
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ALEX STARK, AUG 24 2013

Poverty Reduction in a Changing Climate

By: Hari Bansha Dulal (ed.)

New York: Lexington Books, 2013



With a dearth of research and writing on climate change in the development field, and relatively little attention paid to poverty issues in climate change policy and planning, a book of essays exploring the poverty-climate change nexus should be well situated to provide fresh insights in the scholarly research on this issue. *Poverty Reduction in a Changing Climate*, a collection of essays edited by Hari Bansha Dulal, attempts to fill this lacuna by bringing together a range of perspectives on incorporating climate change into the debates surrounding development and poverty reduction. With contributions from World Bank economists, PhD candidates, academics, and practitioners, this

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edited collection provides a refreshing breadth in the perspectives that it presents and the issues that it tackles. Yet problems with organization and presentation ultimately mean that this book does not live up to its potential.

Part one of the book serves as a kind of scene-setter for the following two sections, exploring broader themes in inequality, politics, and the spatial dimensions of poverty. The chapter by Mitra, Schottli, and Pauli in this first section, "Politics and the room to maneuver" (pp. 21-44), is particularly interesting, providing an analysis of the influence of the poor as a voting block in India, positing that divisions along ethnic, caste, religious, and other lines make the likelihood of India's poor converging on a collective action agenda against poverty unlikely, despite India's democratic electoral system. Part two identifies particular poverty reduction challenges. Some chapters, such as Weiss' on the efficacy of official development assistance, take a broader approach, while others zoom in for a case study approach of specific countries and issues. Joseph and Wodon's chapter, for example, looks at the potential impacts of rising cereal prices on poverty in Mali.

Finally, part three is perhaps the most interesting and substantial part of the book. It highlights particular poverty reduction instruments and policies, drawing lessons learned for reducing poverty. Of these chapters, Johnson's, which considers prospects for policy convergence between the international aid regime and climate change adaptation, and Bushley and Bhandary's, which explores whether REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) and other market-based payment-for-services models have an impact on poverty alleviation as well as forest conservation and emissions reduction, are particularly instructive. They provide considerable material for moving the debates on climate change and development forward.

However, the overall framework of the book is confusing, and ultimately leaves a lot to be desired. First, this collection would have benefited from a more robust introduction giving a broader history of the debate over how climate change will interact with poverty, and how climate change and poverty alleviation programs might be better integrated. A book collecting essays from a variety of perspectives on climate change and poverty reduction is perfectly situated to intervene in these ongoing debates, or to at least provide a thorough overview of such conversations.

Second, while some chapters, such as the ones covering the REDD and international aid regime, are clear in the ways that they seek to integrate climate change into studies of development and poverty alleviation, others do not mention climate change at all, let alone make any substantial connection between poverty alleviation and climate. Soares' chapter on Bolsa Familia, Brazil's much discussed and well-regarded conditional cash transfer program, provides a very substantial overview of the program and a discussion of the future different directions that Bolsa Familia could move in. While this is quite interesting and would prove useful for someone studying development and potential poverty alleviation policies, it does not mention climate change at all, making it very difficult to see why it was included in this volume. A substantial introduction might have been able to provide more context for why such chapters were included, but the relatively anemic one page preface does little to explain their puzzling inclusion.

Third, while the book seems to approach the climate-poverty nexus as a settled debate, there are actually a variety of perspectives within the development literature contesting the ways that climate change and poverty have been linked. More orthodox research, including the breakthrough 1987 report by the Brundtland Commission, which introduced the term "sustainable development," has characterized poverty and environmental degradation as being inextricably linked. According to such conceptions, poverty and environmental degradation are locked together in a "downward spiral," whereby poverty causes environmental degradation, which causes deeper poverty, and so on, implying that poverty forces poor people to degrade landscapes and pollute. However, more recent research has disputed this characterization. For example, some have proposed "environmental entitlements" related to Amartya Sen's work on how entitlements to food and livelihoods help poor people to avoid famine. This approach argues that "local negotiation between different actors within communities may enable access to agriculture, food, forest and other forms of local subsistence," thus reducing poverty and allowing the poor to build livelihoods that are less vulnerable and more able to adapt to the impacts of climate change[1]. Understanding where the authors of the book and its various chapters come down on such debates would have made the chapters more readable by providing the subtext and highlighting the assumptions that each author makes, and a more robust introduction would have provided a perfect venue for this.

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Similarly, such a book might be expected to include some sort of comment on the UN climate change negotiations and the international policies and funding tools that are related to the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the venue for the ongoing negotiations). Research has suggested that there may be substantial gaps between the official UNFCCC and development practitioners' perspectives on adaptation, including differing definitions of adaptation itself. Furthermore, while substantial progress has been made, some argue that the UNFCCC has not done enough to incorporate lessons learned from the development community[2]. Even without providing a more substantial outline of the UNFCCC's mainstreaming of development practices into adaptation, a book on climate change and poverty might well be expected to touch on the various policy instruments of the UNFCCC, including the various funds associated with it. Yet aside from the chapter on REDD, the book makes no mention of any of these policy instruments, or how future negotiations and policies may impact the international framework for adaptation and development.

One final criticism involves the breadth of perspective in the selection of authors. While the book does provide a variety of perspectives from academics, practitioners, and so forth, it decidedly does not include the perspectives of local people. Local perspectives are essential in assessing what sorts of development or adaptation interventions are needed as well as in addressing the effectiveness of such programs, and in an edited collection, there should be plenty of space to include at least a nod to local people's perspectives. Whether this was a deliberate choice or an oversight is left unaddressed by the editor.

Overall, there are several individual chapters in this book that would make for interesting reads for IR scholars, particularly for those interested in the governance of development and global environmental issues. Yet the book's confusing format, and the fact that it declines to touch on several issues that are at the center of academic and practitioner debates about climate change and poverty reduction, mean that the book as a whole could safely be skipped.

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[1] Forsyth, Tim, Melissa Leach, and Tim Scoones. "Poverty and environment: priorities for research and study-an overview study, prepared for the United Nations Development Programme and European Commission." (1998). P3.

[2] Eg Ayers, Jessica, and David Dodman. "Climate change adaptation and development I: the state of the debate." *Progress in Development Studies* 10.2 (2010): 161-168.

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