

***Harris, G. Pacel. 2001. International Equity and Global Environmental Politics: Power and Principles in U.S. Foreign Policy. Ashgate. Burlington, Vermont, U.S.A. Cloth: Price US\$ 95.00.***

***Kirton, J. John and Maclaren, W. Virginia (Eds.). 2002. Linking Trade, Environment, and Social Cohesion: NAFTA Experiences, Global Challenges. Ashgate. Burlington Vermont, U.S.A. Cloth: Price US\$ 79.95.***

The United States emerged as the only true superpower at the end of the cold war. And as such the influence of the United States in global affairs is enormous. One area which has been and will continue to be impacted by American culture is the international environmental policy. Just as in international economic order, America's influence in global environmental agenda looms large. The last twenty-five years has witnessed America's increased impact in the international negotiations, policy concerning climate change, deforestation, biodiversity, ozone depletion and other significant environmental issues.

The United States' position as the world's leader has given it the enviable advantage to influence global agreements in ways that favor its goals and agendas. For instance, one can vividly see American's impact on trade issues, and agricultural technology—to name just a few. It is also true that America's global influence can be noticed in the agenda's of such institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the United Nations. The leverage the United States has in these important institutions has enabled it to influence international policies.

Paul Harris' book dissects the vexing issues surrounding international equity with particular attention to how the United States foreign policy is driven by its power and principles. The book is divided into three sections. The first section contains four chapters; the second section contains four chapters and the third section contains two chapters.

In the first section, Harris wrestles with conceptual and definitional matters which permeate global environmental equity and politics. The author tackles important topics such as the Earth Summit and places the ideas that emerged from the Summit in the perspective of international equity. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of politics surrounding equity issues and Harris' book delves into these matters very eloquently. I wonder if this section could be updated to include the recent sustainable development conference just conclude in (September – October) of 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

It is in the second section of the book that the author truly focuses on the role of the United States in international environmental equity and America's response to global equity issues. It is quite interesting to examine the perspectives given by Harris with regard to how the U.S. national

interests, U.S. Politics and its Altruistic principles influence its stands on international environmental equity.

It is in the third section of the book that the author summarizes the implications of environmental change to the world community and brings or exposes the reader of the book to the theme of the book. For instance, in discussing climate change, the questions surrounding distributional impacts are examined with great expertise. Certainly in industrialization efforts, there are winners and losers. Some parts of the world benefit enormously while others suffer from the pollution and by-products of industrialization. The “sinks” of the world industrialization efforts are usually the poor countries, poor neighborhoods, or the minority areas. It is certainly true that equity matters can be examined in a holistic perspective which covers local, national, and international communities. It should be pointed out that equity issues embrace questions surrounding wealth, poverty, food security, tension, and conflict.

A reader of this book is bound to appreciate the significance of democratic discussions, morality and ethics in resource control and utilization. Perhaps one area which this reviewer feels more light should have been shed in this book is on the issue of environmental externalities. There is a plethora of work on how poor neighborhoods, minority areas, and poor/developing countries have become the dumping grounds of hazardous waste from industrialized areas/countries. Clearly, human rights issues and the rights of nature questions are raised. How much efforts go into “just compensation” for those who suffer the consequences of bad policies or development plans? Although the author points to these questions, perhaps an in depth investigation of these questions should be done in another publication.

Overall, it is the opinion of this reviewer that Harris does justice to the definition of international environmental equity in his book. This reviewer moves away with a clearer understanding of what “just distribution of benefits”, burdens and decision making authority associated with international environmental relations mean and the reasons why the definition provided by the author continues to be an important feature of the U.S. foreign policy. I strongly recommend this book as a textbook for undergraduate and graduate students of environmental studies, development studies, environmental planning and foreign policy.

The second book: **Linking Trade, Environment, and Social Cohesion** which is edited by John J. Kirton and Virginia W. Maclaren is the result of the University of Toronto Centre for International Studies effort in its attempt to address the question of whether the North American trade-environment-labor regime is a model for the global community as it endeavors to garner the benefits that trade and investment liberalization can provide. This book and the conference that was organized by the Centre endeavor to shed some light on important questions of international significance of the model. The issues addressed in the book include:

- 1) NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) would destroy

social and environmental values.

- 2) Effective assessment of the ecological and social impacts of trade and investment liberalization is in its “embryonic stage.”
- 3) The North American model cannot suffice for a global framework for the whole international community.

In attempting to address the above concerns, the following aims are undertaken:

- 1) To identify the general process of, and debate about, globalization
- 2) To assess the current record of the NAFTA regime in integrating trade, environment and social concerns and place this record in the context of major efforts at the global level.
- 3) To determine how well the NAFTA institutions have fulfilled their promise of providing direct civil society participation and done so in ways that promote environmental and social values.
- 4) To explore how well the NAFTA regime has assessed the environmental and social impacts it has brought, given the state of the art for monitoring environmental quality and the environmental impacts of trade liberalization at the local, regional and global levels.
- 5) To identify ways in which the NAFTA model might be improved to better meet the sustainable development goals and how it can contribute to meeting trade related challenges faced by the broader international community (pp. xx-xxi).

The organizers of the book put together papers written by academics/scholars and practitioners from North American Continent. Papers written by representatives of stakeholders such as Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), Montreal, Canada and the Commission for Labor Cooperation (Washington, D.C.) were also included in the book. The editors contributed chapters to the volume.

A book that is the result of a conference has strengths and weaknesses. The strength of the book lies in its depth and breath of the discussion of NAFTA. It should be mentioned that because the contributors are North American scholars and practitioners, their articulations of the issues as they pertain to North America are excellent and are a welcome addition to work in this area. The individual chapters are definitely background material for serious scholarly work/debates in classroom and “think tanks” across North America and the world. The weakness of books like this one is that regardless of the enormous amount of work editors do, weaving the chapters into a coherent and cohesive piece that offers profound scholarship is cumbersome and often times, it is an impossible task and falls shorts of expectations. The chapters of books generally do not fit well together. This book is no exception to that flaw. When scholars and practitioners write, the audience to which they are writing is split because their approaches to the same topic are

different. There are two perspectives—applied and theoretical that scholars and practitioners approach differently. This should be recognized by the readers. The attempt to extrapolate the North America Model to the rest of the world community is a “stretch” since there are more cultural diversity and political differences to wrestle with globally. Regardless of these slight weaknesses, I strongly recommend this book to scholars and libraries.

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