

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Trade, Climate Change and Sustainable Development. Key Issues for Small States, Least Developed Countries and Vulnerable Economies, edited by Moustapha Kamal Gueye, Malena Sell and Janet Strachan (eds.), London, UK, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2009, 180 pages. ISBN: 978-0-85092-881-5

Trade, Climate Change and Sustainable Development explores the intersection of debates about climate change and international trade and development as they impinge upon, and are viewed by, least developed countries (LDCs), small and vulnerable economies (SVEs) and small island developing states (SIDs). Commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat in conjunction with the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, the volume takes a piece by piece approach to international environmental and development issues ranging from technology diffusion, intellectual property rights, bio-fuels, labels on energy efficient goods or fruits and vegetables to taxes on carbon-intensive imports. Importantly, the book takes a policy-oriented approach, reviewing the trade-offs of various policies for those countries most vulnerable to climate change – the less developed. Rather than review the details of each contribution, this review will focus on common threads, strengths and weaknesses connecting the entire volume, while highlighting some particularly important points within the book.

As stated in the preface, the intended audience of the book is policy makers and other stakeholders. It is certainly not a book for the general public, nor for most academics, except for those looking to fill some policy gaps in their research or looking to distill some raw information for a course lecture. Hasit Shah's review of the food miles debate, for example, is in my opinion one of the strengths of the book, and could easily be converted into an effective lecture. In general, however, the book seems intended to provide a forum for policy makers in developing world contexts to advocate their preferred policies. As stated in the preface, the volume includes policy oriented conclusions developed by said policymakers and 'stakeholders' (a term never entirely clarified) at an international conference in Mauritius.

I would argue that the 'developing world' subject-position of most (but not all) of the contributors is both a strength of the volume, and also reflected somewhat in the policy conversations contained within it. The policy goals of the text are more economic than environmental (though to the extent that they are environmental, the book balances mitigation and adaptation goals well), and for the most part reflect typical neo-classical economic policy imperatives of increased trade and growth, access to foreign markets, productive capacity for LDCs, and trade competitiveness. The tactics for achieving those goals, however, are more variable between authors and perhaps less in line with the dominant policy discourses of Northern development institutions. The volume's preface, for example, argues that the best policies to end poverty and protect the environment "may not always be free trade policies" (9) and that market based incentives may not always be the most effective vector for transferring technology. Shah's chapter critiques the labeling of produce with the total number of miles it was transported because transport miles are only one metric in the bigger equation of the carbon footprint of the current global food provisioning system. He points out that LDCs often produce food in a less carbon intensive

manner even after factoring in transport distance, and supports this argument with data. Maria Julia Olivia's chapter reviews the links between trade, climate change and intellectual property rights, and suggests that intellectual property protection can in fact slow technology diffusion to LDCs by preventing informal imitation, while Anthony Okon Nyong's chapter on agriculture mentions, among other things, the failures of the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s. Nyong argues for some form of trade liberalization, but argues that eliminating all trade barriers under current levels of technology will exacerbate climate change, which disproportionately affects LDCs. Thus, one of the positives of the book is that it provides a platform to voice policy prescriptions specific to the needs of the most environmentally vulnerable, and often least heard, countries. Most contributions in the volume are generally well supported by data.

With that said, one of the weaknesses of the volume is that while the broad policy goals of the volume are clearly stated, the specifics of how to achieve those goals are sometimes understated (though this is perhaps an unavoidable problem). The volume's conclusion does well to summarize and synthesize many of its policy goals, but the specifics are still understated. The individual chapters are well organized themselves, but often overlap and repeat information (such as why LDCs are more vulnerable, etc.) between them. In this reviewer's estimation, Shah's, Olivia's and Nyong's contributions stood out as exemplary amongst what is otherwise a somewhat dry, tedious text – characteristics that likely reflect a very specific intended audience of policy makers and vaguely defined 'stakeholders.'

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