

Book Review

Natural Resource Conflicts and Sustainable Development

E. Gunilla Almered Olsson and Pernille Gooch (Eds) (Taylor and Francis 2019)

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At a time when the world is grappling to address climate change and sustainability concerns, the definition of sustainability itself and the definition of development and growth derived, associated or decoupled from sustainability are still continuously discussed and debated. The coupling of sustainability and development as ‘sustainable development’ focuses on development of a country within certain parameters that are identified as ‘sustainable’; yet the foundation of such measures still depends on the extraction and development of natural resources for the survival of humankind. These natural resources are a prerequisite for the existence and survival of humankind and yet these resources are the most stressed, extremely vulnerable, severely damaged, and, in certain cases, on the verge of extinction due to the involvement of humans. The role of humans in context to natural resources is dual—as an exploiter and a conserver—and the paradox of this relationship is vividly discussed in *Natural Resource Conflicts and Sustainable Development*.

Simultaneously, the dependence of humans on the environment and the natural resources around them also leads to conflicts — conflicts about or for survival, conflict between humans and the environment, conflict for natural resources. All these types of conflicts are interdependent on the space and the time that they are occurring and deeply entrenched in the participatory approach to decisions around development, utilization, and the conservation of natural resources.

Natural Resource Conflicts and Sustainable Development examines the evolution, adoption, and interlinkages between humans and the environment. It analyses the core argument of the conflicting values that are put on environmental resources — how these values are represented and interpreted in different ecological settings. It also examines how conflicts in varied social and political milieu can redefine or transform sustainability transitions.

The book brings together a good mix of case studies from both the North and the South. The general perspective is that such conflicts are rare and few in the North, which signifies it to be the most developed. However, even within the realms of the North, there are various communities that are in conflict with the nature or are in conflict with humans to preserve the nature. Similar case studies are available in the South, and the discussions of the case studies from both sides of the world provide a comprehensive world view of the topic at hand.

The chapters in the book are mainly developed on three themes: (i) human–environment relationship, (ii) justice and equity dimensions, and (iii) conflict resolution/transformation and pathways towards sustainability. Some chapters discuss a specific theme, while others represent perspectives on more than one outlook on conflicts and natural resource linkage. The chapters based on ‘human and environment relationship’ encapsulates different discussions and case studies that illuminate how the relationship is identified and interpreted in different geographical landscapes and by varied

communities in specific socio-cultural and political settings. Chapter 6 looks at the nature–culture relationship in Ireland with a specific example of the introduction of raptor that has vanished from the region. The chapter throws light on the major discussion around the impacts of reintroducing species into an ecosystem that has evolved in its absence. Chapter 7 focuses on the *Van Gujjars* in India and their years of conflict around forest use and participation in biodiversity conservation versus the exclusion of humans from biodiverse regions. Chapter 8 discusses Sami reindeer herders and the Adnyamathanha community in Australia that are fighting to preserve livelihood landscapes. The human–environment relationship forms the subject matter of Chapter 5 as it focuses on Swedish fishery and how different agents within the sector are interacting with each other. It also highlights how a vital food source providing sector and fishermen are being viewed negatively as an environmental threat and being viewed so by environmental organizations.

When discussing ‘justice and equity dimensions’, Chapter 3 focuses on the equation between powers, inequalities related to water access, and social sustainability. It provides a comprehensive discourse on the interlinkages and the impact of development of natural resources with less or no participation of the local communities. Chapter 4 highlights the thematic issues through the lens of conflicts around forest land tenure, legal property rights, power and state versus local communities. The case studies while discussing the struggles of indigenous population to maintain and preserve their linkages to the land, natural resources and their methods of nature conservation highlight the human–human conflict on how development is perceived and how natural resources and environment are valued by different communities and different cultures.

‘Conflict resolution/transformation and pathways towards sustainability’ sheds light on cases and mechanisms through which conflicts can lead to sustainable transitions. The Nile River is discussed and how a long-standing conflict over the water has evolved into a reconciliation of water rights for the countries in the region. Another case that forms the subject matter of the book is the rapid development of hydropower in Southeast Asia and how such a development requires to be embedded in sharing of both benefits and risks. Large infrastructure invariably affects surrounding communities in various ways and mechanisms to address such transformations are a prerequisite for development of projects. The chapter provides an overview of typology and various forms of benefit sharing.

The evolving and relevant discourses currently occurring in natural resources, conflicts, and sustainable development nexus are also captured in some of the chapters. These chapters provide an extensive overview of socio-political context, highlight environmental theories of conflicts, and also discuss various natural resources–conflict dimensions.

Natural Resource Conflicts and Sustainable Development provides a fairly comprehensive overview of the different facets of natural resource conflicts and the sustainability linkages. Although some chapters present case studies that have been discussed several times before, they connect the cases to a newly emerging discourse and thinking on sustainability and conflicts. For the uninitiated, it provides a wide range of case studies that illuminate the complex relationship between natural resource conflicts and sustainable development with extensive references that would prove useful to further study the concepts, ideas, and theories presented in the book.