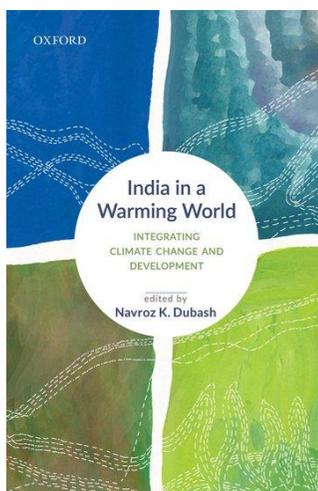


BOOK REVIEW

Policy and Politics in India in the Age of Global Warming

Rohit Jha *

Navroz K Dubash, ed. 2019. *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-949873-4, 576 pp, Rs. 1995 (Hardbound)



The hell fires of 2019-20 that engulfed Australia and incinerated large swathes of the country tell us that the impacts of climate change and global warming are clearly upon us. Small wonder then that climate change activists often describe their challenges in dystopian imagery with allusions to melting glaciers, boiling oceans, burning forests or the extinction of entire species. Navroz Dubash's edited volume *India in a Warming World*, however, is pointedly against a turn to extreme alarm. The collection of essays with an informed and measured introduction, instead, attempts a balance between careful research and meaningful climate activism. At

* Research Assistant on project titled 'Reconceptualizing Rivers in South Asia as Histories of the Biological Pulse', Kyoto University; 198F, Utsav Apartment, Rohini Sec 18, New Delhi-110089; rohitjha95067@gmail.com.

Copyright © Jha 2020. Released under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International licence (CC BY-NC 4.0) by the author.

Published by Indian Society for Ecological Economics (INSEE), c/o Institute of Economic Growth, University Enclave, North Campus, Delhi 110007.

ISSN: 2581-6152 (print); 2581-6101 (web).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37773/ees.v3i1.103>

heart, consequently, is the realistic, if not pragmatic, attempt to debate and explore how development goals can be achieved without warming the planet beyond 2 degree Celsius.

The essays in the volume are broadly clubbed under two distinct, though conceptually overlapping, themes: a) reviews and b) perspectives. The review chapters are written by scholars from various disciplines such as climate science, science and technology studies, law and sociology. The perspective chapters, on the other hand, are drawn from a mix of climate change activists and policy makers. Under the two broad themes, the essays are then further grouped into five sections: a) climate change impacts; b) international debates and negotiations; c) politics; d) policies; and e) climate and development.

In the first section, the readers are offered a nuanced understanding of the various climate models and the presumed impacts of climate change on flora and fauna of India. As J. Srinivasan in his essay notes, for example, that though there is a great demand in India for credible predictions about climate change impacts, the techniques to acquire such capacity is still a 'work in progress' (p. 30). Through an 'event attribution' analysis, Krishna Achuta Rao and Friederike Otto underline three case studies — Chennai floods (2015); heat waves in Andhra Pradesh (2015) and extreme heat in Phalodi, Rajasthan (2016) — two of these cases, Chennai and Phalodi, showed that counterfactual (or non-manmade changes) were the cause of climate change as opposed to factual (or anthropogenic or man-made changes). Nagraj Adve in a meticulous study emphasizes the importance of ethnographic approaches for capturing and describing climate change impacts on the ground. Adve argues that the inaccuracy of climate models at district levels combined with poorly informed development plans can aggravate climate change impact women, mostly from underprivileged communities, facing 'the maximum burnt of unplanned development, global warming and climate change' (p. 75). This section enriches our understanding of climate models, the dynamics and thermodynamics of climate change and the impact of climate change across regions and communities.

The second section takes us behind closed doors and up close into international negotiations and debates on climate change. The writers in this section Anil Aggarwal and Sunita Narain, Tejal Kanitkar and T. Jayaram, Sandeep Sengupta, Chandrashekhara Dasgupta, Shyam Saran, Ashok Lavasa, D. Raghunandan, Lavanya Rajmani, Ajay Mathur and Anunabha Ghosh uncover for us the many political and policy interests that have thus far shaped climate change negotiations at the international level. The writers in this section also appear to jointly share the view that most outcomes

from climate negotiations at the international level have thus far tended to be biased in favour of the developed world. The strategies of tackling climate change at the international level and its impact for developing countries like India is brilliantly brought out in this section. The point of contestation is whether we as a planet should follow the equality principle based on the emission we emit in the present or should we follow that equity principle which takes the historical emissions of all the countries into account. It's an interesting debate. The readers concerned about climate change and its international politics will surely find it captivating and revealing.

The third section focuses on the politics of climate change at national level. It discusses the role of civil society organizations, large and small business corporations, labour organizations and the media. Pradip Swarnakar points out that civil society organizations mostly work within two strategic frameworks: the climate sustainability framework which is 'apolitical' and the climate justice framework which is 'political'. Swarnakar examines in considerable detail the collaborative network building activity of these two types of CSOs and their methods for enabling mass participation and mobilization. The chapter by Shankar Venkateshwaran and Mukund Rajan, on the other hand, looks at how business organizations attempt to address climate change actions. The relationship between profitability and sustainability, they underline, has become a key concern for several Indian businesses. According to them, such concerns have over the years translated into more investments under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the appointment of Chief Sustainability Officers (CSO) in several major Indian companies. However, financially few investor communities in India are factoring sustainability into their business models compared to their global counterparts. Ashim Roy, Benny Kuruvilla and Ankit Bharadwaj map out the debates on the 'transition' by Indian labour, currently embedded in the carbon economy, towards a green economy. India's 'right to develop', they argue, will need to be aligned with achieving public and democratic control of energy and social infrastructure (housing, water, and sanitation). Thus, in their opinion, the role of trade unions and public ownership of production will be vital in addition to the implementation of responsible climate action plans by Indian businesses. The media, fourth pillar of democracy, is also important in raising awareness around all these issues. The mainstreaming of climate change in media, as Anu Jogesh points out, has moved from merely focusing on international climate negotiations towards more keenly following up on domestic challenges and politics. Her emphasis, however, is mainly restricted to the English media reporting from 2010 to 2017. She

acknowledges lack of review of regional papers, which are much larger in their numbers and readership, as a limitation.

The chapters on policy suggest that the implementation of climate change plans in India tend to get entangled in the federal structure of the Indian state with notable disconnect between national and regional goals. Koyel Kumar Mandal looks at the issue of climate finance, whereas Ambuj Sagar examines the transition to climate technology. Both these authors draw attention to lack of clarity in the role of climate finance and the adoption of climate technologies, especially in the planning efforts. Elizabeth Gogoi discusses the status of State Climate Change Planning through a study of State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC) that was first drafted in 2009. As of now 32 states and union territories have approved these plans and their implementation process has begun. Gogoi looks at Assam, Bihar, Chattishgarh, Kerela, Maharashtra and Odisha that are part of the ‘Action on Climate Today’ (ACT), which uses SAPCC as a starting point to support climate change planning. All these states seem to be in the process of tailoring and adjusting the national action plan to their local conditions. Navroz K Dubash and Anu Jogesh take the point further and highlight the intricacies of state climate plans in five states: Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. These states provide us with a polyphonic discourse on the inner workings of climate policy. Though some states are working towards adjusting their climate plan to local environments, there, nevertheless, seems to be an institutional lack of sorts in many states. As an official from Odisha, in an interview said: “we are a weak institutional sector, whether environment or climate change, our strengths don’t lie in institutional capacities” (p. 363). This statement seems to bring out the sordid ground reality of climate institutions in India. As Navroz Dubash and Shibani Ghosh, in the first chapter in this section, put it: “the past decade has witnessed a rise in climate institutions in India, but it has been a reactive and ad hoc process” (p. 342).

The last section is dedicated to the issues of development and climate change. While Lele and Krishnaswamy argue for the ‘sequestration method’ in the context of forests, Kumar and Vishvanathan call for the mainstreaming of climate change adaptation for the entire agriculture sector. Rohan Arthur argues for a coordinated and planned approach to tackle rising sea levels and Veena Srinivasan warns of the consequences of increased variability with more droughts and dry days which will impact the access to water for many. The need for district-level institutional frameworks based on community lines seems to emerge as the shared vision of the contributors of this section.. Integrating development with climate change in other words, can be the best bet to overcome a situation

that is otherwise mired with political skirmishes, institutional weaknesses, mis-communication and lack of sectoral coordination. Outlining pathways for the democratic control of resources and the planned implementation of credible strategies for dealing with climate change impacts, hence, is an urgent requirement.

In sum, the collection of essays provides us an up to date understanding of the climate change debate in India. The message, in essence, is that policymakers and political decision making can be involved in a productive dialogue and need not always be seen as antagonistic and locked in zero sum games. Though India's social and economic worlds are undoubtedly made up of complex and often conflicting interests, sustainability challenges can most likely be met, as *India in a Warming World* tells us, by informed and considered interventions rather than by alarm and knee jerk reactions.

The essays in this volume, moreover, besides being ably supported by an insightful introductory essay by Navroz Dubash, are helpfully complimented by a range of infographics, tables, facts, anecdotes and empirical data. The reader will surely be engaged as much with the accessible style and presentation of the book as they will be with its content. This book is highly recommended, and let's say even necessary, for anyone who is looking to understand climate change in India and wants to do something about it.