

Book Review. DeShazo, Jessica L., Chandra Lal Pandey, and Zachary A. Smith. (2016). Why REDD will fail. New York. Routledge. ISBN: 9780415729260

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The book "Why REDD will fail" begins with a shocking argument that Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in developing countries (REDD) will fail. This program is run by the United Nations and has the intention of funding efforts to conserve forest, and thus, achieve a reduction in carbon dioxide emitted to the atmosphere, and therefore, lessening the adversities of climate change.

The book's title brings a lot to mind. It also critiques and reviews in detail one of the most recent conservation developments that are market-based, a view that has taken a center stage in conservation policy frameworks globally. The main goal of REDD, as the authors show, is to highlight the forests' role in absorption and storage of carbon dioxide, and mainstreaming it in the market economies (pg.3), by funding all efforts geared towards the conservation of forests, as well as promoting provision of basic facilities and services that enable this conservation effort possible. The authors are very convincing in their argument by pointing out the weakness of this approach towards mitigation of climate change especially when the definition of "forest" is not clear, coupled with the fact that those countries receiving this aid lack transparent governance structures on its use. The conspicuous refusal by the developed countries to get involved in green-house gas reduction further hinders the achievement of mitigation of climate change.

This text is directed towards policy makers and scholars who are not so familiar with ecological politics, that is, the relationship between organisms and their environment. The emphasized critiques or weaknesses of REDD in this book will readily be understood by political ecologists and placed within the bigger picture of discussions on the potential risks and challenges posed by these conservation and sustainable development approaches (Igoe *et al.*, 2007; McAfee 1999). Those who will read this volume will come to discover that the book borrows heavily from the themes of

“neoliberal conservation” and “green developmentalism”, but cannot be said to argue similarly with this literature, something that would have familiarized the authors’ critiques. REDD, for instance, argues against turning forest resources into commodities but rather symbolizes the highest point of market-based conservation efforts that, within the ideology of ecosystem services, have gained a lot of impetus (Gómez-Baggethun *et al.* 2010). If the authors of this book had committed even one section of the book to give the historical background of the evolution of REDD within the wider concept of market-based conservation, and the critiques in it, it would have made it easier to understand their discussions and clear the confusion surrounding the REDD's evolution timeline. Instead, this book reproduces nearly all the arguments the political ecologists make and only applying them to REDD. This lack of freshness in adding to the world of knowledge does not come as a surprise to the experts in this field. Neither does it detail those unique areas that make it different from other market-based programs dealing with conservation that are similar to REDD's.

The main strength of this book lies in its appropriateness as an introductory book (primer) on REDD and in generally addressing the challenges connected with market-based conservation programs such as REDD. This text will be handy and helpful in conducting surveys or courses related to sustainable development, formulation of environmental policies and economics connected to ecology. There is a lot of repetition in the opening paragraphs of the chapters. REDD's definition takes up the first two chapters of the book where its historical development and evolution is traced, as well as the influence it has had on climate change policy in the last 20 years. They also provide a link between The Kyoto Protocol, the Noordwijk Declaration on Climate Change, the Noel Kempff Mercado Climate Action Project and REDD, giving a brief description that links RED to REDD, which has now become REDD+. These first two chapters also expound on REDD's policy frameworks, the countries involved, and the institutions that financially fund this program.

The third chapter delves into the key challenges and hindrances towards the potential achievement of REDD's success as perceived by the authors. These include leakage, the problem of forest definition, and additionality. The authors give a convincing argument as to why monoculture plantation like oil palm should not be considered as forests because of the dangers it poses on biodiversity (a balanced ecosystem), as well as its inefficiency in carbon sequestration or absorption and healthy balancing of carbon. It is

therefore ironic, misplaced and very misguided that REDD gives incentives in form of funding to this socially and environmentally risky ventures of monoculture where carbon emitted cannot be lessened or mitigated. The authors, also in this chapter, exhaustively explore the issue of leakage, that programs like REDD do not solve environmental damage, but only displace it to another location. Besides, this raises pertinent questions as to whether this program adds any value to the environment or it is just a mere financial initiative that is devoid of any economic value.

The third chapter seems to be in sync with the fifth chapter because the fifth chapter continues the arguments in the third chapter especially on areas of increased green markets and market liberalization in solving the challenges of degradation in the environment. The fourth chapter, instead, briefly discusses the forest enablers or the things that allow the existence of forests in countries that vary from country to country or region to region (p.56). These things are often intricately connected to capitalistic market systems (p.58). The fifth chapter then moves the discussion on the problems connected to REDD discussed in the third chapter to the bigger scale at the doorstep of capitalism itself, thus, broadening it. This chapter takes the reader through the ideological foundations on which these market-based conservation approaches are hinged, right from free-trade agreements to market failures with the purpose of unraveling, albeit successfully, the flaws and limitations behind REDD's reasoning. And based on this, the authors cite the dependency theory in order to explain why REDD will fail especially in the achievement of stated objectives, particularly in promoting sustainable development (Viotti & Kauppi 1999). The third and the fifth chapters when read together provide an in-depth analysis of the demerits of REDD in its entirety.

The sixth chapter connects the overriding thematic discussions and arrives at the inevitable conclusion that REDD will fail to help the developing countries in every respect because it will fail to mitigate the climate change, which is the goal in focus. The chapter speaks to the governance problems associated with the REDD programs, and firmly stresses that the soaring demand for forest products and the vague definitions of forests will ultimately spell doom to REDD. The authors conclude that the intended impoverished sectors which are supposed to benefit end up not benefitting much because of the problems associated with REDD. Such problems include lack of equal power relationship among the involved countries, poor governance structures in the benefitting countries, and high

operating costs. They further argue that the undying high demand for forest products and free markets that only pursue profit will help very little in the climate change mitigation.

This conclusion may be very perplexing to the readers because the authors more often than not waver in their stand from advocates of "why REDD will fail" to "how red can be improved", and thus, suggesting ways of improving REDD which includes certifying forest programs and allowing only sustainable tagged-forest products be available in global markets. This is so contradictory in that their earlier argument on why capitalist markets will not be able to stem and solve the environmental ills that are created by it is so convincing. For instance, the reader does not easily reconcile very opposed arguments like when these authors assert that they feel strongly that REDD can be made better and driven to achieve its set goal (pg.114) vis-a-vis statement that any program similar to REDD will fail at the end, if the way markets are structured will not change and if the dependence on fossil fuel will not change (pg.115). It can be noted that these forest certifications that the authors advocate for do very little to change the global market economy, in addition to the fact that it works very differently from REDD. The foundations upon which this support for forest certification is premised upon may seem to the reader as quaky and only present superficial solution. This may be very frustrating to a reader who is expecting tangible and radical solutions.

Generally, this book gives a firm critique of REDD as it clearly examines the history and the positively unique features of this program. That the authors of this book are experts in environmental policies stamps authority to the arguments in it. And thus can be said to be a very timely book, though the critique in it might not be easy to be believed in the field. This book is very helpful especially in educating current and future policy makers on the dangers of market-based conservation policies and, more importantly, adds to the existing literature that addresses similar environmental concerns.

References

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