

BOOK REVIEW

A RE-APPRAISAL OF FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

by James J. Douglas

Martinus Nijhoff/Dr W. Junk, The Hague. 1983. 178 pages. ISBN 90-247-2830-4.
Dfl 75.00 (approx NZ\$40.00)

This book is divided into three Parts – Issues in Economic Development: The Role of Forestry in Development: Constraints and Conclusions – each of which contains two chapters. The first Part provides a mishmash of the models, theories, philosophies, and issues that have entered the literature on economic development and growth since the end of World War II; the second reviews forestry projects in the light of the first section; the third outlines what the author feels must be done if the ratio of successes to failures in forestry projects is to be improved. Although the language throughout the book is non-technical, many of the explanations of theories and models are poor, and some of the examples used to illustrate points are of questionable validity.

Directed “at foresters who work or have an interest in the developing world, and at development analysts and theorists who are concerned with the forestry sector”, descriptions of important or seminal material in development theory have been kept to a minimum in order to keep the book’s size within “reasonable bounds”. Given that the intended audience will contain many who have not had a great exposure to development literature, it is doubtful if “Rostow (1956) and others argued that developed countries have passed through an intensive phase of economic development, after which growth becomes a self-sustaining process” is a sufficient explanation of why this stages model had such an impact on the non-academic world of politicians and journalists in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Similarly, “Lewis (1963) in presenting what is generally taken as the case for utilisation of under-employed rural labour elsewhere in the economy . . .” is an inadequate treatment of a model which assumes a fixed supply of arable land and an increase in the population on the land to the point where its marginal product is less than or equal to zero. A slightly more detailed explanation of Lewis and a brief description of Rostow’s stages model, perhaps with mention of the fact that criticism of it was not slow in appearing, would not have greatly increased the length of the book but might well have improved its readability.

The message of Parts II and III could probably best be summed up as “To be successful the forestry projects selected, and the technologies followed in their implementation, must be appropriate to the country in which the projects will be carried out.” The author argues, with a number of telling examples, that in many places the view taken has apparently been that forestry’s role should be as a provider of raw material for an industrialisation programme. As he demonstrates, this has frequently resulted in the selection of projects that have been notable for their lack of success. In the author’s view (one that is shared by this reviewer) for many Lesser Developed Countries well-designed fuelwood projects would be more appropriate.

There are, however, too many annoying loose ends, sweeping generalisations, and basic errors for one to be either happy with or confident of the analysis. For example, on p. 83 we are informed [correctly] that Haley & Smith (1976) claimed that "the primary purpose of investment in forestry . . . is not the growing of trees but the formation of capital". This statement is presented as that of the economic rationalist. Unfortunately, it isn't correct. Economists are not enamoured of capital for capital's sake. In their world investment takes place so that consumption may occur at a future date. The primary purpose of investment is thus consumption not capital formation.

The Malaysian example of Part 3.6 falls down in a number of respects. In particular, it fails to show that good use is made of the resources employed. The author falls into the trap that he himself has mentioned previously of quoting large figures – "these exports earned Malaysia US\$684 million in 1980" – as if by themselves they can prove wise resource use.

As for sweeping generalisations, it would be hard to imagine a more sweeping or incorrect statement than "it needs to be borne in mind that in Africa, for example, virtually no creation or replacement of fuelwood resources has ever occurred: it has simply been gathered from the bush". Fuelwood stands – many of them eucalypt plantations – can be found in a large number of African countries and many writers, including the author of this book (p. 107), have cited examples of the successful creation of such plantations.

No review of this book would be complete without a mention of its looks. The eighth in a hard-backed series on "Forestry Science", this volume, like the preceding seven, has been produced by photo-reduction of the author's original manuscript. It is difficult to make books produced in this manner (usually as a means of cutting costs) aesthetically pleasing and, to add insult to injury, this book is full of errors.

Some of the problems are simply the result of sloppy proof-reading – e.g., p. 6. "Meier concludes that *rapid population* is a cause, as well as a consequence of poverty", or p. 10 "Changes in the status of women (who . . . generally desire fewer children *then* men) is also a potentially important factor" [Italics are mine.—Ed.] However, other problems are more deep-seated. In a discussion of socio-economic factors that are indicative of conditions conducive to fertility decline (p. 9) the following table is produced:

Table 1.3 Indicators of Conditions Favourable to Fertility Declines

Variable	Threshold Range
	%
Population in cities 20 000+	16 – 50
Non-agricultural labour force	50 – 65
Life expectancy	60 – 70
Female marriage before 20	10 – 29
Female literacy	60 – 75
Hospital beds/1000 population	5
Newspaper circulation/1000 population	70 – 100

Source: Mauldin and Berelson (1978)

The threshold range for the first variable – city population – at 16% to 50% is so wide as to make the variable meaningless as an indicator. The third, sixth, and seventh variables, i.e., life expectancy, hospital beds, and newspapers, are interesting because percentage would not appear to be the appropriate description. Most people are either 100% alive or 100% dead. As for the other two – what constitutes 5% of a hospital bed, or 70% of a newspaper circulation? The fourth variable is female marriage before 20, but is it early marriage that one wishes to encourage or late marriage? As presented, this variable would suggest that the younger females marry, the more favourable would be the conditions to a decline in fertility, whereas in fact the reverse is true.

Unfortunately, mistakes such as these are not confined to just one section or chapter, and there are other problems as well. At least two different typewriters have been used on the main text and corrections have obviously been made with another. There are also hand-written corrections, and evidence of a substantial rearrangement of the order of certain sections. The book lacks a subject index and footnotes are grouped at the end of each Part rather than on or near the page to which they refer.

At approximately \$40 this book is too expensive for one to ignore faults such as the above. They reflect badly not only on the volume itself, but also on the series and its publishers.

The forester interested in development, provided he accepts that forestry is a part of the economic system, would be better off to buy a good economics text on development.

G. P. Horgan