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Review: World in Transition: Fighting Poverty through Environmental Policy

By German Advisory Council on Global Change

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German Advisory Council on Global Change. *World in Transition: Fighting Poverty Through Environmental Policy*. London: Sterling, VA : Earthscan, 2005. 268 pp. ISBN: 1-85383-883-7 (hardcover) \$US115.00.

Produced by the German Advisory Council on Global Change, this technical report is written with a European-centered view, though the principles set forth apply internationally to developed and developing regions alike. It is quite refreshing to see the intermingling of environmental issues and economic policies. Published in the USA and UK by Earthscan in 2005, it is presented to the Western world with a plethora of the conditional "should." Without a more engaging demonstration of successful case studies or tangible benefits, such a report may fall on deaf ears.

The report's organization is impressive. The detailed contents lay out the report so any section, almost down to the individual paragraph can be found with ease. Boxes, tables, and figures are listed with a substantial collection of acronyms and abbreviations. A summary for policy makers offers a comprehensive overview at the outset so that the reader is thoroughly prepared as s/he encounters specific topics.

The following hypothesis is presented: Global environmental policies are prerequisite to global poverty reduction. While focusing on poverty rather than peace, this hypothesis echoes the most fundamental relationship between the environment and the quality of life set forth by Gifford Pinchot as he called for a UN conference on the environment and peace early in the 20th century. Whether it is peace, prosperity, or politics, the environment plays an essential role in achieving economic or health goals. The environment is the underlying foundation for any regional or international policy, yet, it is so often neglected or taken

for granted. Those days are over, however, as we must now "pay the piper" for past neglect and exploitation.

Several concepts permeate the report: sustainability, linkages, complexity, selflessness, holistic approaches, cooperation, mutual benefits, sharing, and accountability. Additionally, the wealthy are called upon to halt their exploitation of the poor. In fact, developed nations are expected to assume the lion's share of financially correcting or compensating the developing nations for environmental ills, since it is the developed world which is producing the vast majority of pollutants impacting global systems. The acknowledged challenge to improving the environment boils down to going beyond promises to taking decisive action and paying the costs for such actions to be taken. The long term costs for no action are always higher than taking positive steps now.

This must-have reference work is essential for staff in private industry, government bureaucracies, and NGOs as they all strive to understand the issues and promote actions that will positively impact the environment as well as the material good of the poor around the world. There are few goals more worthy and this text helps us all become better positioned to play a decisive role in making the world more livable for everyone.

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