

BOOK REVIEWS SECTION

Scobie, M. (2019). *Global environmental governance and small states: Architectures and agency in the Caribbean*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. 224pp, hbk, ISBN: 978-1-7864-3726-6. US\$120.

The conservation movement has been a major shaper of thoughts on environmental governance. While scholars such as George Perkin Marsh and Mary Somerville realised the value of conservation and the implications that environmental abuse had for the general wellbeing of humanity, the situation was transformed at the turn of the 20th century with the advocacy of Gifford Pinchot, who argued that “conservation stands against the waste of natural resources which cannot be renewed ... it stands for the perpetuation of the resources which can be renewed ...”. This proved to be the precursor to a movement that challenged the dominant view of the world as a place capable of sustaining limitless growth. The first major work was a 1972 study commissioned by the Club of Rome and aptly named *Limits to growth*. The central finding of this study was that the closed-earth system was incapable of supporting unrestrained growth, and containment policies were therefore necessary to achieve ecological and economic equilibrium. This is the philosophical springboard of the author in this ground breaking academic study of the intersection between global environmental governance and small island developing states (SIDS), with particular reference to the Caribbean.

This publication is an invaluable contribution by the author to the existing scholarship on global environmental governance. It explores how future environmental outcomes are intrinsically linked to current policies, histories and contexts. Global environmental governance both at a local and regional level must be articulated within the framework of the conduct of local state and non-state actors and institutions. The text affords the reader an in-depth analysis of the struggle to develop adequate governance structures for Caribbean SIDS to manage the relationship between the environment and economic forces, particularly with respect to sustainable tourism, climate change, international marine and ocean resources, renewable energy and energy security, Caribbean cultural and natural heritage, and the global trade-environmental nexus. The book culminates with an examination of key issues and emerging trends in Caribbean and earth system research.

By far the most challenging area of global environmental governance impacting Caribbean SIDS pertains to climate change governance, given that most of the Caribbean SIDS are heavily reliant on the tourism industry. To that extent, the treatment of sustainable tourism is critical to this book. However, while the author acknowledges the threats posed to the environment by tourism and the need to develop a governance model for sustainable tourism that would mitigate the adverse effects on the environment, the broader challenge is the threat posed by climate change to Caribbean SIDS.

A projected sea related impact is the proliferation of tropical storms. It is likely that as oceans warm-up, storms will increase in intensity and regularity. Hurricane Irma, a Category 5 mega-storm hit Barbuda, with a land area of 160 km², on September 6th, 2017. With winds of up to 300 km per hour, the storm obliterated much of the island’s vegetation and infrastructure. All 1,800 residents of the island were forced to evacuate to Antigua, Barbuda’s larger sister island, which suffered only minor damage. Two weeks later, Hurricane Maria hit

landfall in Dominica, unleashing just as powerful winds on an island of 70,000 people. In a speech filled with pain, delivered to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Prime Minister of Dominica, Roosevelt Skerrit, stated “We as a country and as a region did not start this war against nature. We did not provoke it ... We do not pollute or overfish our oceans. We have made no contribution to global warming that can move the needle. But yet, we are among the main victims” (September 23, 2017).

Two years later, it was the Bahamas that felt the wrath of a hurricane in the form of Dorian. When Hurricane Dorian hit Abaco Island as a Category 5 storm with 300 km per hour winds, it tied for the strongest landfall of any storm on record. It was then the turn of the Prime Minister of the Bahamas, Hubert Minnis, to address the UNGA. “Small island countries ... around the world are on the frontlines of being swallowed into an abyss, created initially by human activity and increasingly by inaction” (September 23, 2019).

The chapter on climate change governance and Caribbean SIDS in Scobie’s book focuses primarily on mitigation measures and adaptation strategies for dealing with climate change. The reality is that the contribution of Caribbean SIDS to greenhouse gas emissions is miniscule and any emphasis on mitigation as part of the global governance of climate change is cosmetic. Moreover, while some adaptation strategies may assist in alleviating the consequences of climate change, these strategies cannot address the existential threat posed to Caribbean SIDS by hurricanes of increased intensity and frequency. This is the conundrum facing Caribbean SIDS: this is perhaps the main weakness in this text on global governance of the environment and small states. There is need to focus on the third and emerging governance principle for dealing with climate change: climate change survival. In the absence of effective adaptation strategies to deal with more frequent and intense hurricanes with the accompanying destruction of Caribbean SIDS, it is high time to address the recovery process in the aftermath of the passage of hurricanes. The tragedy is that Caribbean SIDS are left with the obliteration of critical infrastructure (including buildings, roads, seaports and airports), that are not only vital to sustain human life but also tourism. Thus, climate change brings a collision of community and economic survival. The challenge is for the emergence of a global governance model that will assist impacted Caribbean SIDS to rise from the ashes of destruction and regain some semblance of normalcy within a reasonable period of time.

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