

J. Servaes (Ed.), **Sustainable Development and Green Communication: African and Asian Perspectives**. London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 240 pp., \$44.35 (paperback).

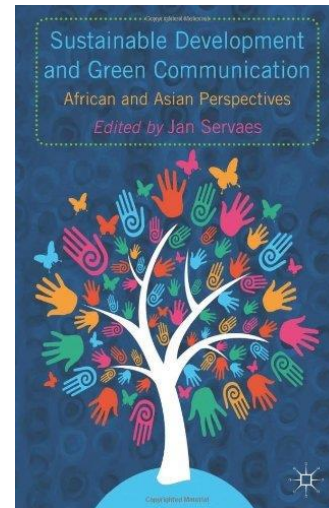
Review by  
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As a graduate student interested in working in the field of communication for social and environmental change, I am always interested in discovering new strategies to deal with the “wicked problems” inherent in social change and development work. Jan Servaes’ most recent book, ***Sustainable Development and Green Communication***, proposes sustainable development as the solution to solve the complex, diverse issues facing our world today. Case studies and methodologies are presented for researchers and practitioners in the field of communication and development.

In his introduction, Servaes breaks down the concept of sustainable development (SD), highlighting the differences between traditional Western and Eastern perspectives of SD as well as alternative models. SD is seen as multidimensional; it can be a process, and it can occur at different levels and within different contexts. Since many stakeholders on global, national, and community levels are involved in sustainable development, communication as a process is very important and should be open, inclusive, and participatory.

Part I focuses on the tension between economic growth and environmental preservation and the impact of climate change on vulnerable Asian and African nations. In chapter 1, Kosta Kostadinov and Jagadish Thaker highlight the interconnected nature of sustainable development and climate change in that achievement of SD goals will be challenged or stalled by the negative effects of climate change. The authors advocate “mainstreaming” of climate change with existing SD goals to meet the targets of SD and adaptation to climate change. These underdeveloped nations are considered to have the greatest potential to implement this mainstreaming because they are in the process of creating new infrastructure. An example to support this argument is the need for renewable energy sources to increase access among Indian households while decreasing greenhouse gas emissions that are affecting the country through typhoons, the melting of the Himalayan glaciers, and rising sea levels.

In chapter 2, Chin Saik Yoon addresses the paradox of negative and (short-term) “positive” effects of climate change and the difficulties for communication practitioners working for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change. The following reasons are outlined as why work on climate change will be different compared to past communicators’ issues: (1) no short-term or medium-term benefits directed for specific groups; (2) climate change is a global issue, so causes of problems may not be local; (3) no results will be seen in our lifetimes; and (4), action is not for the benefit of individuals today but for the



future generations. Current and future mitigation roles for practitioners are described as well as focus points for forthcoming communication work on climate change.

In chapter 3, Boonlert Supadhiloke analyzes gross national happiness (GNH) and the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (SE) as alternatives to Western measures of development because GNH and SE aim to measure human well-being instead of economic well-being. Supadhiloke describes how Buddhist principles, such as the importance of "right speech" and being truthful and mindful, have already outlined communication strategies that can guide this alternative development paradigm. Three case studies (an integrated agricultural farming project; a youth group for Khao Chamao Environment Conservation in the Klaeng district, Rayong province, Thailand; and participatory development communication for GNH in a Bhutanese community) illustrate the implications of communication, GNH, and SE. These case studies show how participatory, organic, and action communication can increase standards of living and encourage people to live in harmony with their environment and community.

In chapter 4, Kiran Prasad highlights women's activism in environmental communication (both mainstream and alternative) in an Indian development context. The groups are influenced by Indian indigenous culture and philosophy such as the belief that everything in the universe is created by God and therefore must be honored and protected. These women's ecopolitical groups are collectives against environmental degradation in pursuit of economic growth. They are advocates for development that does not destroy their natural resources; they organize, manage, produce, and distribute media content as collectives despite their lack of formal education. Alternative media such as community radio, video, newsletters, magazines, and the Internet are often used by Indian women to have their voices heard about issues in their communities and to debate about their rights. The group Narmada Bachao Andolan is used as a case study to illustrate Indian ecopolitical women's communication, networking, and social mobilization.

The chapters in Part II concentrate on information communication technologies for development (ICT4Ds). Osée Kamga and Fabien Cishahayo argue for viewing use of these technologies as a practice ("proportional technologies") instead of in terms of appropriation. The authors argue that technology only has meaning within a given context, and therefore is not the driver of social change; it is valuable in terms of how people use it in within their social practices. The proportional technologies approach recognizes the social, economic, and cultural resources people bring to new technology. This approach addresses sustainability issues because it assumes sustainability is possible since it is working with practices that are already part of the sociocultural system or context. In another chapter, Royal D. Colle and Tran Van Dien highlight the increase of ICT4Ds and the reinvention of higher education institutions as contributors to development as movements that can be used in conjunction to better achieve development goals. Examples of higher learning institutions in partnership with ICT4Ds such as telecenters and farmers' radio programs in India and Zambia are mentioned.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 in Part III discuss the environmental, social, and cultural costs of social change. In chapter 7, Maitreyee Mishra presents three case studies of indigenous tribes in Orissa, India, protesting their displacement from the land on which their livelihoods and spirituality depend. These cases illustrate the use of alternative media as well as (international) mass media as tools for the marginalized

to access information and have their voices heard. Alternative media channels, which are not government-mediated, can be used in ways national media does not allow. The Internet, in particular, offers opportunity for marginalized populations to share information and network on an unmediated platform. In chapter 8, Patchanee Malikhao cites the increase in HIV infections in Thailand since the 1990s as due to increased globalization creating a hybridization of sexuality in which people are thinking and behaving differently, with the influence of Western mass media playing a crucial role. In chapter 9, Henri-Count Evans considers media as the best way to combat climate change and outlines the factors that impede green communication in Africa, such as: (1) lack of communication infrastructure accessibility; (2) distorted information due to ties between multinational corporations and news media; (3) public interest in sensational new stories; (4) inaccurate reporting on scientific issues due to lack of specialized training for journalists; and (5) the colonial (business) language and scientific jargon that characterize most climate change talk.

In the final chapter, Servaes identifies 10 major challenges for communication for sustainable development, focusing mostly on issues of access to information and opportunities for true participation among marginalized groups. The editor considers participatory communication and social mobilization as well as communication for structural and sustainable social change as processes that have the potential to encourage SD because both processes focus on long-term multileveled sustained change. They also both primarily involve interpersonal communication, which has routinely been shown as the most effective means of changing behaviors. Servaes recognizes the role of various environmental factors as well as capacity building in creating and sustaining SD; he advocates for greater understanding in these areas and for each context to have its own communication for development strategy.

This book examines several interesting concepts regarding sustainable development. For instance, in chapter 1, Kostadinov and Thacker present SD in terms of intergenerational equity as well as justice for the most vulnerable populations and countries who are feeling the greatest negative impacts of climate change. The concept of proportional technologies proposed by Kamga and Cishahayo in chapter 5 is also a novel approach to ICT4D. One criticism I have of this proportional framework is the authors do not discuss the ways in which technologies can be used to retain the status quo and keep certain community members marginalized.

There are significantly more Asian than African perspectives represented by the authors in this book. I was surprised the African Centre of Communication for Development – ACCD (formerly the Southern Africa Development Community-Centre of Communication for Development) was not mentioned, as this group has developed several participatory communication methodologies to alleviate poverty and contribute to rural development in a sustainable manner.

This book's greatest strength is in its diversity: A range of topics are covered with both research and practice perspectives, and the case studies are helpful in illustrating the concepts presented.

This book is timely in that sustainable development is increasingly becoming a popular topic in both academic and practitioner discourses on lasting social change. With the recent well-publicized impacts of climate change such as typhoons, floods, and droughts, serious thought and informed action on

SD is needed. This book is an excellent resource for both academics and practitioners interested in learning more about holistic sustainable development , encompassing cultural, economic, social, and ethical as well as participatory elements.