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Review of *Sustainable Mountain Development: Getting the Facts Right* by Jack D. Ives

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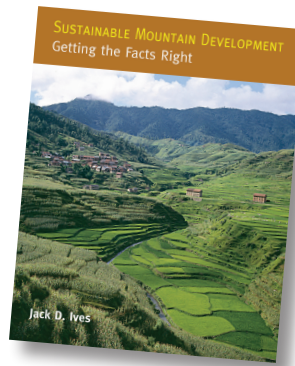
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Sustainable Mountain Development: Getting the Facts Right.

Jack D. Ives. Lalitpur: Himalayan Association for the Advancement of Science, 2013. 293 pages. ISBN 9789937261951.

Reviewed by Pasang Yangjee Sherpa

Sustainable Mountain Development: Getting the Facts Right is a personal account of Jack D. Ives' lifetime of commitment to mountains as objects of adventure, intellectual curiosity, and activism. In this 2013 autobiographical book, Ives continues the themes of defeating widely endorsed mountain myths and "getting the facts right" from his previous publications (Jack D. Ives and Bruno Messereli. 1989. *The Himalayan Dilemma: Reconciling Development and Conservation*. New York: Routledge; Jack D. Ives. 2004. *Himalayan Perceptions: Environmental Change and the Well-being of Mountain Peoples*. New York: Routledge). The mountain myths refer to once widely held beliefs that mountain people were the root cause of mountain environmental destruction, especially

in the Himalayas. Jack Ives and Bruno Messereli (1989, p. 2) argued that this phenomenon, called the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation (THED), needed to be analyzed, challenged, and dismantled before any real progress could be made toward a resolution of the Himalayan problem.

In *Sustainable Mountain Development*, Ives shows that the provocative "what would you like the facts to be" (Michael Thompson and Michael Warburton. 1985. "Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale." *Mountain Research and Development* 5(2): 115-135) is still as pertinent as they were thirty years ago. Ives shows that conservationists, scientists, and administrators continue to generate mountain crises largely based on sentiment than established fact (p. 253). THED appears to lurk, but in a new incarnation. Deforestation and landslides are now replaced with climate change and glacial lake outburst floods.

In this book, Ives chronologically weaves his observations and experiences of working on mountain issues, occasionally sharing a joke (p. 3) or telling the readers about his encounters with spies (Chapter Five). This book is, however, not only about THED or other mountain issues on which he has worked. It is also about him. It is about the mountain man who grew up just a few miles from the North Sea in Grimsby, England. Ives' fascination with the mountains began in his boyhood. He remembers being swept off his feet as a fifteen-year-old by the views of the Lofoten Islands, Svalbard glaciers and ice caps under the midnight sun, and the pack ice off Franz Joseph Land close to 800 N (p. 3).

The chapters transition smoothly from personal into professional, with the latter predominating. Ives highlights selected international mountain events that extend from 1964 up to 2013. Some of these

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events include the 1986 Mohonk Mountain Conference, the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit (UNCED), and the 2002 declaration of International Year of Mountains. He offers behind-the-scenes planning, preparations, and discussions at these events that led to present-day institutional approaches to sustainable mountain development. He shows that these events were able to bring greater global attention to mountainous landscape that had once been regarded as remote, harsh, inaccessible environments of little interest to anyone other than mountaineers, explorers, and scientists (p. 1). Ives acknowledges that such success was possible because of a small group of academic mountain researchers from all around the world whose work evolved into international activism for the sustainability of mountain environments. He emphasizes that success did not come by coincidence but rather on account of extensive preparation, examination, mobilization, planning, and learning from one another.

In his personal stories, however, Ives makes readers marvel at the “chance encounters” that shaped the author’s career trajectory (p. 6). The author presents the “incredible happenstance, coincidences of meetings and events, and unexpected opportunities to present [his] views to powerful personalities at critical moments and, in turn, of being influenced by those remarkable individuals” (p. 5).

Ives began his career when the world was continually grappling with a succession of attempts to impose Western scientific wisdom and superior technology on “ignorant peasants,” who were categorized as ignorant simply because they were poor, very different, and apparently simple in their way of living (p. 6). One wonders how the chain of events, perceptions, power dynamics, and institutional agenda would have altered if these peasants were welcomed by their institutional counterparts to participate in the important international mountain meetings of the twentieth century. How differently would we be dealing with mountain problems today?

In the final chapters, Ives discusses the depiction of impending disasters in the Pamir and the Himalaya, recognizing the challenge of balancing a decision to go ahead with preventative action of natural cataclysmic events, which are difficult to predict, against the usually very high costs involved. An overriding issue with cases of mountain hazards, he points out, is the “tendency of the news media and even self-serving scientists, administrators, and politicians to seize any opportunity to create public alarm” (p. 255). He warns that “unease, panic, even unwise costly preventative measures provoked by public or governmental pressure may be more disruptive than the potential event itself” (p. 255).

The lesson to take away from this book, full of teachings from a lifetime

of working on mountain causes, is located in the question it implicitly engages with throughout: How does sustainable mountain development occur? The book suggests that it involves the tenacity of individuals, coincidental meetings, active political organizing, and receptive audiences—and sustaining these collective conversations and collaborative work.

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